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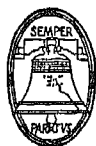
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SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

by
ATTILIO GATTI

**Illustrated with Photographs
by the author**



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New York

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SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

Introduction

SOUTH OF THE SAHARA—and of the predominantly Arabian, or "White," countries which surround the "Great Desert"—there stretches another, entirely different Africa. This is the Black Africa of Negroes and Negroids, of thickly populated, *extravagantly fertile valleys*, as well as of the greatest rivers and lakes, of mountains too high to be inhabited, of plains too arid to be settled, of jungles too unhealthy to be frequented by anybody but the pygmies who have survived there from prehistoric ages.

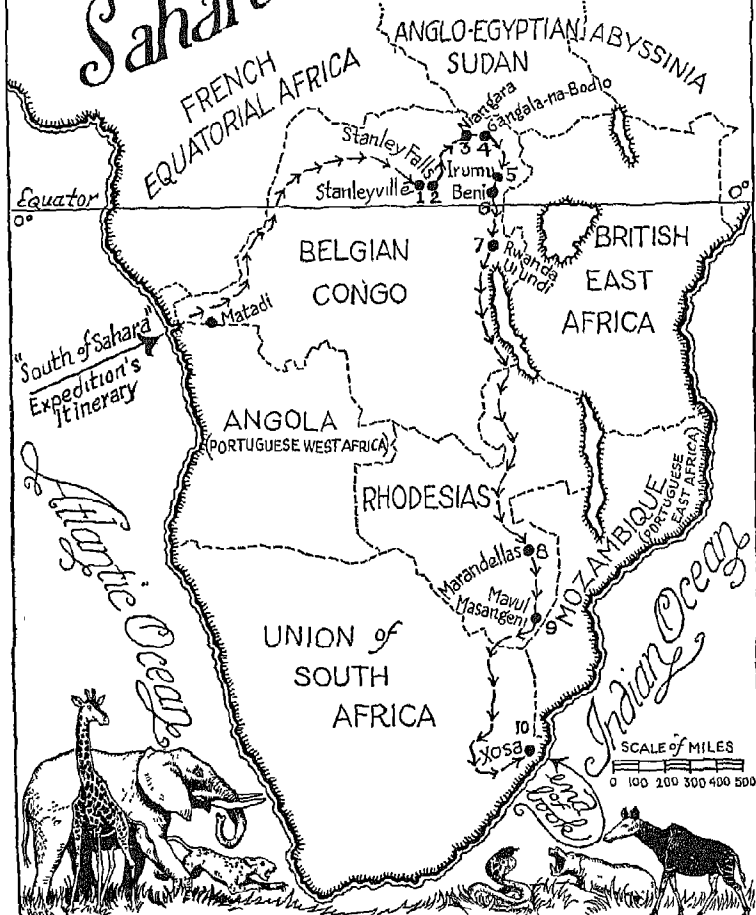
This section of Africa also is the Dark Continent's inexhaustible treasure chest. It is from here that there has come the unending flow of diamonds, gold, radium, copper, silver, tin and vanadium so vital to the Allied effort. It is toward here that in peacetime was drawn—as will again be drawn when peace returns—a few of the most enterprising explorers, scientists, adventurers and big-game hunters from every civilized country. For there are enormous expanses for the most part still barely known or entirely unexplored. And in those primeval forests, and in the little frequented regions which surround them, are concentrated Africa's strangest human types, her most varied animals, her weirdest "living fossils," her rarest, most amazing creatures.

It is through this fascinating part of Africa that I have led

South of the Sahara

ITINERARY
FROM THE U.S.:
FIRST TO MATADI,
THEN UP THE
CONGO RIVER TO

- 1 STANLEYVILLE. THEN: BOOK BEGINS AT
- 2 STANLEY FALLS (WAGENIA) AND GOES ON TO
- 3 NIANGARA, MANGBETUS,
- 4 GANGALA-NA-BODIO (ELEPHANTS TAMED);
- 5 IRUMU WEST OF ROAD, JUNGLE OF BONGO
- 6 BENI AND OKAPI;
- 7 RWANDA, GIANT WATUSSI;
- 8 MARANDELLAS, "FARMER'S WIFE";
- 9 WHERE "THE COBRA STRUCK TWICE";
- 10 "THE WOMAN AND THE PYTHON".



my latest scientific expeditions, filling with thrills and adventure the years immediately preceding World War II. As a matter of fact, this whole period of efforts and researches, of hopes and disillusiones and discoveries, constitutes in itself something that, in terms of supplies, tactics, strategy and diplomacy, could be called a small war of my own, a war which I, with the help of my companions, passionately conducted for the routing of disbelief, for the conquest of new bits of information, for triumph over age-long mysteries.

In the same way, every expedition, and every important phase of each expedition, could be likened to a miniature battle of this same war against the obstinate obscurity of things unknown. Only, just as the detailed relating of all the fluctuations of any war's every single battle would be a tedious affair, so a chronological report of our activities would be bound to become repetitious and tiresome. Hence my choosing instead the more lively and flexible line of a geographical sequence, and my hope that the reader will follow me along the combined itinerary covered by my three last expeditions.

In a great sweep, then, we will be able to swing from Stanley Falls, in the very heart of Central Africa, up to the elephant country of northeastern Belgian Congo; to plunge deep into the gloom of the primordial evergreen rain jungles of the equator; to soar up to the brilliant sunlight and the bracing breezes of the Mountains of the Moon; to plod across the immense bush of the Rhodesias; and, by climbing up and down the yellow-green rolling hills of the South African veldt, to wind up in the secluded, still untouched native territories of Natal, which the Indian Ocean borders on the east.

Before starting on this 10,000-mile trail, however, there is an acknowledgment I wish to make—that of the admiration

and gratitude I owe to the Hallicrafters organization, their imaginative leadership, their precise technique and exquisite craftsmanship. For much of the success which crowned the various quests related in this book is due to the invaluable assistance and comfort which was every day given us by our Hallicrafters short-wave receiving sets—those neatly compact, wonderfully efficient “magic boxes” which never once failed to keep me in contact with my expedition companions, and all of us in touch with the rest of the world.

And now, let's go. Or, to say it in Kingwana, Central Africa's own Esperanto: *Funga safari!*

1.

The Ribald Racketeers of Stanley Falls

ABOUT A mile east of the small Belgian Congo town of Stanleyville, two rivers meet. One, the Tshopo, is a good-size stream which has meandered for miles through the gloom of the mostly unexplored equatorial jungle. The other, the Luabala, is a giant which in its northward course has crossed the greater part of Central Africa, and has been swollen with the waters of many more lakes, swamps and rivers than even the most recent map shows.

The meeting of these tropical rivers takes place almost exactly on the imaginary line of the equator. And its results, which for a long time baffled the greatest explorers of the last century, are still today recognized as of momentous importance and exceptional interest. Here, where these two rivers join, begins the mighty Congo, whose origins took both Stanley and Livingstone a good many years and a number of heartbreaking expeditions to straighten out. The great river's beginning is marked by a two-mile-wide, twenty-four-foot-high rocky step, which forms the ever-roaring, fearfully boiling and foaming cataract which Stanley finally discovered in 1872, and which was named Stanley Falls for him.

This is the place where you can see in operation one of the

most remarkable rackets of all Africa, one so amazingly successful that it has gone on steadily since time immemorial. And it is also one which neither the arrival of the white man, nor the rapid spread of the white man's civilization has managed to change in the slightest degree.

As in the remotest past, this peculiar region continues to offer the world's outstanding example of a whole race—the Wagenia—composed completely of racketeers. For here generation after generation is born, brought up and trained exclusively to perpetuate, exploit and enjoy to the fullest that very racket which has determined and shaped the physical and mental characteristics of the entire people. It is a racket which has made them radically different from every other tribe of the neighborhood—in appearance and strength, in temper and humor, in bravery and reckless dispositions.

When this state of affairs began, no one can even guess. But it is not difficult to figure out how it started.

Down those thundering waterfalls, immense quantities of water precipitate all the time. That twenty-four-foot drop is sufficient to create currents of such power that, above the falls, not even the most powerful motorboat could attempt a crossing with any chance of survival, much less of success. Deep under the surface these currents are even stronger. Any fish, from the smallest to the mightiest, which ventures within reach of these currents, is immediately caught by them, irresistibly sucked into them, and shot forward, downward into the Congo. Both the Tshopo and the Lualaba, especially the latter, are teeming with fishes, of every size and kind, including varieties which the Lualaba, in its long course, has gathered from practically every region of Central Africa.

Being neither an ichthyologist nor, I must confess, even

much of a fisherman, I shall not attempt to enumerate in detail these varieties, the more so since I know from good authority that scores of them have not as yet been classified. But I must mention at least the few specimens I was able to recognize on various occasions, and the ones which impressed me most.

I remember, for instance, fishes with an oval, compressed body similar to that of the seabats and the dories. And I could hardly help remembering the catfishes, up to four or five feet in length, which are notable for the total absence of scales and for the powerful, poisonous spines with which they can inflict a dangerous wound and inject venom into it. Some varieties of these catfishes build nests in which to deposit their eggs. Others carry the eggs in their mouth until hatching time. Others again—the most astounding of them all—have complicated extra breathing organs to help them travel overland from one stream to another. This may seem incredible, but it is true.

Then there are the cylindrical-shaped rhino fish, weighing up to seventy pounds; eels that top this mark by a good ten pounds; and electric eels and fishes whose natural “batteries” are strong enough to electrocute even mammals of respectable size.

Easy to identify, also, are the many different barbels. For they have in common the horrible-looking, beardlike appendages on their upper jaw with which they probe in the mud for food, just as swine do with their snouts. A comparison which isn’t so far-fetched as it may seem, for it is common for these barbels to weigh around 150 pounds.

There are the tiger fish and the giant tiger, both formidably toothed, and the latter—the *Hydroscyon goliath*—

reaching to seven feet in length. And, monster among monsters, the dark-colored Nile perch and the Tanganyika perch, or *sangala*, either of which often weighs more than 200 pounds.

So it can be realized that the waters which rush down the Stanley Falls are thick with an incalculable amount of fish, mostly of enormous size—more than enough to bring a booming prosperity to any tribe, however large it might be, that could capture a fraction of this ever-flowing wealth.

But here is the catch—and no pun is meant. No human being, nor any man-made craft, could withstand the impact of those millions of tons of water cascading with such terrific force.

The remote ancestors of the Wagenia, while scratching their heads over this apparently insoluble problem, figured out also another angle. If they could contrive some trick by which they could tap that inexhaustible flow of fish that was practically under their noses, they would do more than keep their larders—and bellies—well filled. The more fish they could take out of circulation, the less there would be downstream. Thus the populations along the Congo River, who had practically no other source of nourishment, would have to come to them and buy their surplus.

And what would those populations use for money, in a country where money didn't exist and barter was the only established way of trade? Why, whatever commodity the Wagenia asked in exchange. That is, whatever they wanted but didn't particularly care to raise, hunt or produce. That meant wealth, comforts, luxuries, copious food, plenty of leisure. And no back-bending tillage. No long, tiring marches. No boresome, tiresome toil.

Spurred by such a wonderful vision, the Wagenia of the distant past attempted a hundred different ways of carrying out their scheme. According to their legends, the falls swallowed and crushed to a pulp many men, destroyed and smashed to smithereens entire boatfuls of experimenters—while the rest of the tribe became better and better battle-trained, tough and belligerent by fighting more and more stubbornly one war after another. That was a thing which they had to do, whether they liked it or not, in order to hold for themselves that profitable, strategic spot which every clan of the surrounding country was desperately trying to get away from them.

Finally, the god of the waterfalls rewarded the Wagenia for their valiant stand. One night, tradition says, his ever-roaring voice began to subside. Before dawn it was as low as a murmur. And that murmur urgently spoke in the ears of the Wagenia chieftain of the time. Instantly he rushed out of his hut. Bravely he plunged into the chilly river and swam toward the falls. At once he realized that the invincible currents had vanished from the waters, that the waters themselves were inexplicably reduced to a shallow, subdued stream, scantily sustained by the little rivulets which dribbled down the great stony step. In the feeble light of dawn, he saw for the first time the rocks which composed that gigantic step and which until then had always been hidden by an unbroken wall of onrushing water.

In less imaginative terms, the phenomenon only meant that an exceptionally long dry season in the south had temporarily brought the Lualaba to an unheard-of low level. But the sight was like a revelation to the Wagenia chief. It offered him an

inspiring opportunity. And he was clever enough to take immediate advantage of it.

Without losing a second, he rushed back and got all his subjects up in a hurry. Naked as they were, he dispatched them all to the near-by jungle. The men were to cut as many slender, strong tree trunks as they could carry in, and plant them in the cracks of the rocks during that day. The women and children were to collect as many creepers and lianas as they could, with which to tie all those poles together.

It was an epic day of work. Everyone in the tribe understood the wisdom of the chief's decision. No one, from the child barely able to walk to the oldest man barely able to carry a little load, spared his efforts.

Late that night, by the light of the torches, the great task was finally accomplished. From each crack in the rocky step of the falls a forty-foot pole stuck out toward the sky, firmly planted, carefully tied to the near ones by crosspieces supported by other poles bent at an angle against the course of the river. The skeleton-like skyscraper was so perfectly built that even when the whole tribe stood on its top, it did not give or move as much as a finger's breadth.

As if in approval, later that night the waterfall's god again raised his voice. It rose and rose, until in the morning it reached its usual thundering tone. Once more the chief urgently called everyone out of the huts—to wait for the first light and see if their work had been swept away, or if it had managed to resist the renewed fury of the steadily increasing waters.

Again everyone rushed out without wasting any time in putting on clothes. That is why, the Wagenia say, they have ever since despised clothes. And it is why, disregarding every

complaint of missionaries and administrators, they still today prefer to clothe their many children only with fresh air; their shapely girls with a string around the waist and a couple of beads casually swinging from it; their highly vocal women with a piece of bark cloth the size of a postage stamp; and themselves with nothing most of the day, which they spend in the turbulent waters of the river—the rest of the time a skullcap of leopard hide and a necklace of leopard fangs is their dress.

After some anxious waiting, that morning in the far past, the light came. And through the clouds of spray once more rising high from the falls, the Wagenia saw their structure shake like foliage in the wind. Huge trunks had disappeared. Others were being snapped under their eyes. And others, still attached by the ligatures at their upper end, were pushed up and down as if, instead of weighing a ton each, they were merely tiny sticks.

On the whole, however, the structure resisted the force of the waters. And the Wagenia were so gladdened by their triumph, that—not knowing how else to express their elation—they jumped on each other, man against man, woman against woman, child against child.

And this they kept up, each of them putting all his strength into the playful effort to try to subdue and overthrow his adversary. Which was how the *kobubu* was born—the far from delicate sport, half-wrestling, half jujitsu, which the Wagenia still fervently practice. Through the centuries, the amusement has evolved into a full-fledged game with clear-cut rules. The basic one, however, consists in smashing an adversary's bones, twisting his neck, or breaking open his

skull in the shortest possible time, and with the minimum effort.

Having originated this genteel pastime, the ancestors of the Wagenia still had to evolve a technique by which to use their skyscraper structure of poles. Great fish-traps, taller than a man, solidly built from reeds in the form of a cone, answered the problem. These were to be lifted up and down from the palisade by means of strong lianas.

Once lowered into the very midst of the foaming chutes, such traps offered little resistance to the water. True, all the smaller fishes were swept out again through the wide interstices on the sides. But all the large ones remained in—so many of them, in fact, that the Wagenia soon discovered they had to go at least twice and perhaps three or four times a day, to empty the traps. Otherwise, so many huge fishes would pile up in each cone that their weight would break the lianas, strong as they might be, and wrench the whole filled-up contraption free.

This, then, became the Wagenia's most serious problem—how to reach the falls and the structure built above them. From upstream it was practically impossible. And it was impossible from the sides also, for along each shore the river had corroded a deep churning channel that was impassable. The only approach was from downstream—across an inferno of surging foam, of furious crisscrossing currents, of swirling whirlpools, which, fearful enough during the dry months, became positively hellish during the rainy season.

Today, when you watch an eighty-foot-long Wagenia canoe make its way through that watery inferno, you hardly believe what your eyes are seeing. That is, unless you fully realize that centuries of daily experience and training are behind the

wonderful synchronization of the paddlers, their instantaneous response to the gestures of command of their leader, the lightning advantage that the leader himself takes of every change of wind and current.

Accidents and mistakes, of course, still happen. Then canoe, men and paddles suddenly disappear from view—and you won't see them again, from where you stand on the shore. The men will be fortunate if, by swimming with the currents better than fishes, they finally manage to extricate themselves from the raging maelstrom some two or three miles downstream. The canoe will be mauled to splinters, or, in case of special luck, it will emerge in a battered state, miles further on.

Most times, however, what you see is an enormous canoe propelled in perfect unison by from forty to eighty standing paddlers, which gathers more and more momentum until it reaches the first strong whirlpool. There it halts abruptly, as if against a solid wall. At once, however, it shoots around, like the hand of a maddened clock. Then, suddenly, all the men on one side lean overboard, holding on their paddles with every ounce of strength, using them as a brake and, in the meantime, as a support. That stops the rotating motion.

Now you are sure that the canoe is going to overturn and spill its whole contents of sweating humanity into the boiling waters. Instead, it is only a cunningly calculated scheme to get the canoe into a certain part of the next whirlpool. You are properly admiring the recklessness of this maneuver, as well as the exquisite feeling that directed it, when all of a sudden you see the canoe catapulted ahead. A frenzied paddling follows, which increases the speed to such a point that the craft seems to be flying above the foam—directly toward the rocky step straight ahead.

A crash seems inevitable. You hold your breath—and see the canoe again stopped, then seized, and flung around like a piece of straw by still another swirling eddy. But that was no accident. The canoe is hurled in the direction you least expected, but actually it was all perfectly calculated and timed. It loses speed while it points toward one of the lower rocks. It comes to a dead stop, not a foot from it.

Some of the men leap out with anchoring ropes. The others follow in a stream of wildly yelling joy. Like monkeys, they climb up the poles. Like acrobats, they join to form human chains which swing back and forth until they bridge a gap that the disappearance of a log has created in the superstructure. Over that human bridge, men rush with surprising agility. Soon one group here, another there, are vigorously pulling up the traps, extracting from them the huge silver-gleaming, writhing fishes with which each trap is filled to capacity.

With the little sharp knife that he usually carries in a bracelet, every man slits open a fish from head to tail. And voraciously he devours the interior. For he believes—as his great-grandfathers did—that only in this way can his body acquire all the fish's swiftness, resistance and cunning in water.

One after another, fishes of astonishing size and incredible numbers are dispatched, their insides lapped up, their remains thrown with sure aim into the canoe. The empty traps are lowered again. The fishermen slide down the poles. Shouting, joking, laughing, they go back to their places, gaily ready to face the ordeal of the return, that they—and they alone—know how to master.

During long, fearful minutes, the crew is again tense, all eyes fixed upon the leader, all muscles working in seemingly

superhuman effort against the ambushed, treacherous forces of the falls.

Then they are back at the shore, where women and children are congregated to discuss the prowess of their men with other crews just returned or about to start, and ready to take the catch to the market.

There, natives of many a downriver tribe wait with their wares. They offer smoked meat of elephant and antelope, ivory tusks, leopard fangs and skins, plumage of rare birds, vegetables, fruits, grains, clay pots, calabashes, tom-toms, bark clothes—all they can produce to obtain the fish in whose nourishing properties they have more faith than in any other food.

That is the Wagenia's best time of the day. His morning task is over. Afternoon trips to the traps are, as far as he is concerned, lost in the mists of a distant future. His appetite stimulated by the pickup of those pounds and pounds of fish interiors he had just swallowed as an aperitive, he nonchalantly tastes samples of some of the merchandise offered to him—enough of them to feed any other native for a day.

Then he makes the price of what he wishes to buy. No O.P.A. to hamper him—nor any scruple of conscience either. What he wants, he gets. What he pays for it is determined by one factor only—how much fish he wants to use that morning for barter. If it is plenty, he gets its worth for it. If the catch has been only fair, he values his fish at double. If the catch has been poor—well, he just triples or quadruples its valuation.

It is outrageous, but what can the other natives do? Start back on the long journey to their village empty-handed, except for their own products which they had brought from so

far to barter? And he laughed at by their wives and neighbors? No, that they cannot do.

It is a squeeze, and the other natives know it. They protest and squawk. But the Wagenia only slaps his formidable thighs in loud merriment, enjoying each complaint as a grand joke. Anyway, he knows that nobody is going to start a quarrel with him. He is too healthy, with all the fish he eats; too strong, with that muscular feat he is carrying out several times every day; too brave a warrior, with the countless battles that generations of his ancestors have fought to keep the falls for themselves.

So he picks up some more samples and swallows them, and he bellows with laughter, for he is the most rascally rascal of all Central Africa, but a merry one. And in the end he obtains what he wants, at just the price he wants. He gets away with anything, but that's only his right. For, after all, who but the Wagenia has the fish market in his grasp?

Looking forward to a little bout of *kobubu* in which to expend some of his excess of vitality to help his digestion, the Wagenia goes to his hut. After all those aperitives, his appetite is formidable. And he has attended to the morning's business. So he feels entitled to his first serious meal of the day.

Of course, to take photographs and movies of such over-ebullient people was not exactly a rest cure for us. Especially since the Wagenia's most valued distraction—as well as his safety valve for the excess of his overwhelming vitality—is in the arguments he is always prepared to start with clansman, friend and relative.

These arguments are not short-lived affairs. The Wagenia

seems to think that, if concluded too quickly, they would lose most of their entertainment value. He takes care of this by carrying them on and on, in a sort of lived serial made up of protracted, animated installments which go on from the chutes to the shore, from the shore to the market, then back to the village and again to the foaming waters.

If, in the process, innocent bystanders get involved, trampled on, or are otherwise caused to suffer—well, that's just too bad; but it may be an added attraction and the cause for more enjoyment and further merriment.

We learned this to our cost. To take good pictures, in Africa as elsewhere, you have to stage them. This doesn't mean faking in the least. On the contrary, it's the only way anyone can reproduce anything with actual truthfulness, with a sense of reality, overcoming all the otherwise impossible obstacles of light and space and time. Only, staging does necessarily mean acting. And if your actors and extras are Wagnia—well, you'll get as much fun as you ever would want, and sometimes even a trifle too much of it.

Take, let us say, four hundred of these black, irrepressible gentleman, and, holding on to your temper, succeed in persuading them to take their respective places in half a dozen canoes. Send each canoe to a point separated from you by some hundred feet of thundering water. Shout with all your might continuous instructions through this pandemonium. Add to this the "gentle harmony" of multitudes of powerful lungs wildly singing to the frantic tempo of the tom-toms that are brightening up the spirits of each crew. Keep it going for a daily average of six or seven hours, while simmering under the scorching sun of the equator, which is refracted by the pile of rocks on which you stand and generously reflected by the

roaring river. Stir the whole with the murderous feeling engendered in you by the aforesaid four hundred Wagenia, who are mostly doing exactly the opposite of what you say, just for the sheer fun of it. Serve this hot—but very hot—and be accordingly bothered to distraction and perspiring beyond recognition, and you will get an approximate recipe of our usual work among the Wagenia.

This, however, was only the routine. Now, add just a dash of that passion for arguments by which your actors and extras are possessed. Then you'll get really something!

One morning, for instance, after only a few hours of martyrdom, we finally managed to get two of the biggest canoes to go together through all the fishing operations in a rapid continuity—so as to take them all in the same light and without wasting a fortune in film.

Everything had proceeded as nicely as one could ever expect from those ruffians of Wagenia. And through the tele-sights of the movie cameras we were following the return of the two canoes when, immediately after the most dangerous maneuver had been safely accomplished by both of them, one of the pirogues suddenly disappeared from our field of vision.

Automatically we blinked our eyes and cleaned the lenses—but there was only one canoe, brightly advancing toward us on a wave of gay songs. Then some specks, as of dust, appeared in the small, luminous frame, and we had to raise our eyes to see what was happening.

It was not difficult to understand what had occurred. We knew that the night before a friendly battle between the two crews had sent to the native hospital in Stanleyville a good score of natives with badly broken heads and bones. Evidently the head man whose people had had the worst of it

had decided on a little revenge, and had taken advantage of the critical moment when the other canoe had just ended its hazardous sweeping movement. So he had delayed a command by half a second. His pirogue had barred the path to the other, whose eighty paddlers, leaning over one side, had had a moment of indecision—just a fraction of a second, but enough to overturn their boat and throw all of them into the raging water.

What good healthy fun the Wagenia had that day when the innocent-looking first crew landed, and especially when the second canoe arrived, after having been floated again at a point a couple of miles downstream by its fishless, exhausted, maddened paddlers!

Of course, it was nothing but one of the usual friendly arguments of the Wagenia. Yet that night their chief himself had to be speedily forwarded to the native hospital, where he would be able to keep a watch on the majority of his tribe, and at the same time meditate for some weeks over the fate and fractures that usually befall a pacifier.

Grateful to our luck for having helped us out of the general grand mêlée with all our cameras intact, we promptly decided to continue our trip northward, toward the Uele country and the Mangbetus, who might not be so exciting and humorous, but who would make somewhat tractable subjects for our studies, photographs and movies.

2.

The Gourd-Headed Mangbetus

ONCE UPON a time—and this is not a bedtime story, but a true episode of the Belgian Congo's history—there was a great sultan by the name of M'bio. He was a cruel man, ferociously hostile to any European interference. And while his armies of Mangbetus and Azandes tried to stem the advance of the English regiments which were approaching from the north, in the south he kept at bay an emissary of the King of the Belgians who for months had been waiting for an audience.

This M'bio knew by instinct what the "protection" of a white man's country would mean to his people. And what he had heard about neighboring nations already "protected" by French and Belgians and British and Spaniards seemed to make him even less anxious for any contact with Europeans.

However, the Belgian in the south, Captain Paulis, had to do his job. His feet were cooled by the long waiting, but his head was hot and his heart at the boiling point, for he had with him only twenty native soldiers from the east coast. And what could he do with such a force against the unending armies of M'bio? Or how could he stop the well-armed columns of the British?

Captain Paulis was pacing up and down in his tent, studying maps and calendar, to figure out when the British would presumably reach M'bio's capital, and how he, with his own laughable "army," could precede and outsmart them—when a small printed mark in an almanac gave him a sudden inspiration.

Immediately he made his decision and gave the marching order. In a few hours he was in contact with M'bio's armies. After a token combat skillfully managed so as to produce the maximum of noise with the least possible bloodshed, Paulis and his troops fell into the hands of Basongoda, one of M'bio's multitudes of sons, who, proud of his easy victory, at once sent them under escort to his father.

Finally, Paulis was in M'bio's capital. True, it was as a prisoner, not as a guest and the ambassador of his King. But he was there, at last. And just in time, too. For scores of sultans, chiefs, generals and other notables of the Mangbetus and the Azandes were gathered there, as if expecting that some decision of vital importance was soon to be taken. And, luckily for him, Paulis knew that M'bio, in addition to being a merciless tyrant, was a born gambler, terribly superstitious, and accustomed to making *bengue* every time he had prisoners in order to let the omens decide their fate.

In this case, the *bengue* consisted of putting a starved hen in a granary of maize. If the hen came out alive, and of her own volition, it would mean that the white man's life should be spared. If, by gorging herself too avidly, she died in the hut, there would be no doubt that the spirits wanted the captive to die. Naturally, or not, in this case the hen promptly died.

But Paulis had foreseen the emergency and was ready for it.

"What kind of a sultan are you?" he shouted at M'bio. "I thought you were too wise and too great a king to let a miserable chicken decide for you. I, for instance, make *bengue* only with the moon!"

A general murmur of surprise and incredulity spread through the night. Angry voices rose here and there. As for M'bio, he was so indignant and, at the same time, so curious that he remained speechless.

Paulis took immediate advantage of the momentary confusion to drive his point home. Dramatically, he pointed to the moon.

"See the moon?" he pointed. "Now," he said, "as soon as my words are out of my mouth, I will make that very moon die of a slow death. And so will M'bio die. Of a slow death, from which no power can save him. But," he continued, in the frightened hush, "if M'bio will at once make an act of submission to my King and become my blood brother, I will save him. And I will revive the moon, too."

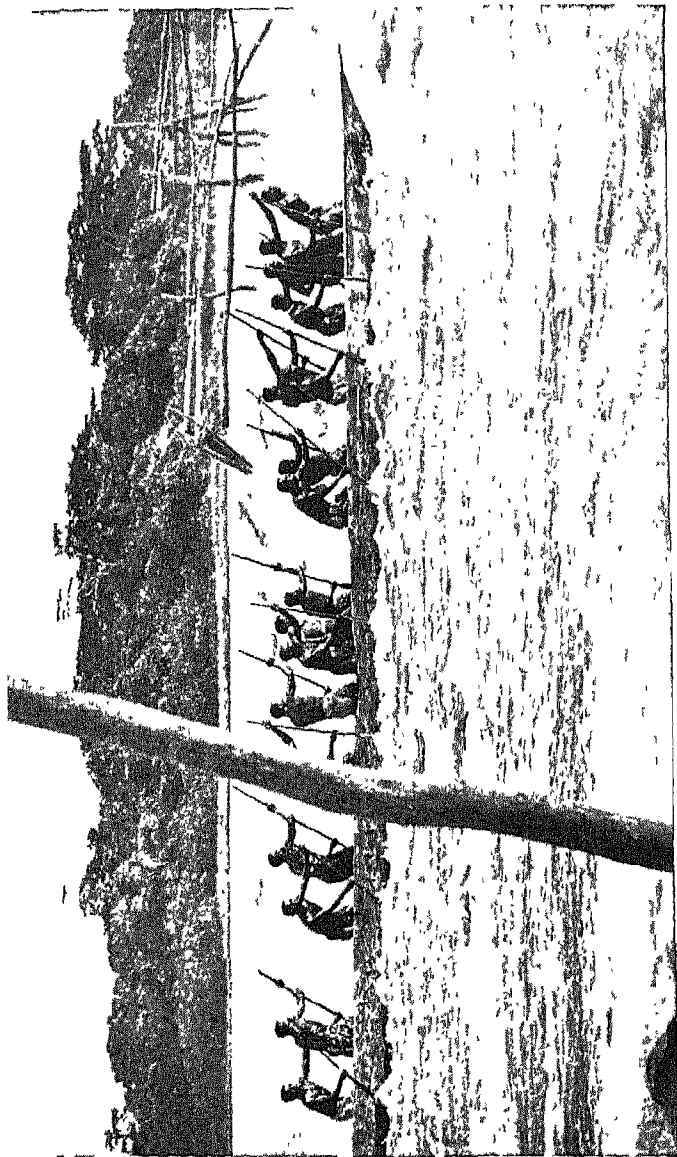
Of course, only Paulis knew the exact moment of the lunar eclipse he had seen announced in the almanac. And he had timed his speech so well that he had barely ended it when the moon began to disappear.

In a short time the village was plunged into an eerie darkness. Everybody was in a state of awe and consternation and M'bio himself was in a frenzy of terror. In that magic darkness the sultan was willing to agree to anything Paulis wanted. And so a great new province was added to the colonial empire of King Leopold II.

What makes this story so fascinating to me is the fact that it did not happen hundreds of years ago, but as recently as 1905. And it was recounted to me by an eyewitness who, still



The Kobubu



Wagenias in action at Stanley Falls



Mangbetu mother shaping the skull of her child



King Ekibondo dancing

today a man in full possession of his faculties and energy, had reached his ninth birthday before a white man ever penetrated into his country. He was fourteen—and a warrior—when, in 1895, Mangbetus of other, already subjugated sultans had rebelled against the "friendship" of the Belgians and massacred four of them and hundreds of their soldiers. He was already twenty-four, and well along in his marriage career, when he saw Paulis do his little trick with the moon, and seal its success by becoming "blood brother" to the people he had just won through such a piece of audacity.

This man is Ekibondo, King of Niangara, one of the chief sultans of the Mangbetus of the Uele and, without doubt, one of the whole world's most enthusiastic believers in big families. For he has married ninety-seven wives, of whom, at sixty-four, he still has left an even seventy. And around him live 108 of his children under twelve years of age, without counting the sixty grown-ups already married and with broods of their own, or the sons and daughters of various ages who have died during Ekibondo's fifty-odd years of marriage.

"The number of them," he said sheepishly to me one day, "is something that not even my head wife can remember. Though she has the memory of an elephant."

Astonished as they were by the size of the King's family, the other members of my expedition soon were much more amazed by the general characteristics of those gourd-headed people.

Everywhere in the enormous village reigned an order, a discipline and a cleanliness such as cannot be found in any other Congo town, either black or white. Most of the Mangbetu men who resided in the village or came to it to visit with relatives and to pay homage to the King were physically

during the mating season. His trim, muscular torso emerged with virile grace from the enormous loin cloth of bark tissue beautifully colored in red, brown and purple, and held in place by a wide belt of okapi hide from which hung soft pelts of small animals.

On his left, and two steps behind, walked his latest, youngest, prettiest wife. She wore only a small loin cloth. In one hand she held the blue silk scarf with which she would exercise her privilege and special duty of mopping up at once any drop of perspiration that might appear on her master's brow or broad shoulders.

Then came the head wife, her arms and ankles covered with bracelets made of the hair of elephants' tails. The other sixty-eight wives followed, giggling, but in orderly formation—a glance from the head wife would immediately silence any chatter.

All that any of the King's wives wore was a brief bark cloth, a gloss of palm oil, and the heart-shaped, graceful *megbe* of woven raffia which completes the Mangbetu woman's toilette—an ornament when she walks, a protection when she sits and a shield of modesty at all times. A glance at Eki-bondo's spouses showed that their ambitions were not centered in raiment so much as in permanent decorations, such as the elaborate tattoos carrying all over their faces and figures the traditional designs of the race; and in the unbelievably complicated arrangement of their hair, the mushroom-like coiffure exaggerating the elongated form of the skull. Additional decorations were made with the black juice of a wild fruit. Ivory bracelets or amulets and elephant hairs around neck, wrists and ankles were the ornaments worn.

Only the most coquettish and elegant had strange-looking long pins in their hair.

As soon as we had seated ourselves—we on our camp chairs, Ekibondo on a sort of square half-bed brought by slaves, and the women on the round stools of carved ebony each of them carried—I asked the sultan if those pins were by any chance ivory reproductions of human bones.

"No," he replied, with a twinkle in his eye, "those are real bones. From the arms of enemies I have killed with my own spear. When I was young," he added reminiscently.

And so they were. It reminded us that until thirty years ago, when European occupation was firmly established, the Mangbetus, together with their cousins, the Azandes and Batotelas, had been the most inveterate cannibals of all Central Africa.

These peoples, of belligerent temper, reckless courage and highly developed intelligence, conquered their present territories only a few hundred years ago. Then—nobody knows the exact date—their well-disciplined armies swept southward from their native Sudan. Once they had disposed of the feeble opposition put up by the disorganized Bantu populations, the original inhabitants of the Uele, the usual scramble followed for sharing the conquered territories.

Finally the kingly sultans—all belonging to the Mutshaga and Makere clans—and their victorious armies settled down to organize and exploit their new territory. The least noble and influential of them, not having had the means of bringing with them women of their own races, began to marry among the subjugated peoples.

The results, still clearly visible today, are three distinct

classes. That in which the vanquished's blood is preponderant constitutes the plebe, which tills the soil, raises crops, builds huts, supplies all the man power needed by the sultans and the labor required by the white man for the opening and upkeep of roads and for every sort of manual work.

Another, formed by the descendants of the masses of the conquering armies, is a sort of middle class from which come musicians, ivory and ebony carvers, hut decorators, minor sorcerers and medicine men, the sultan's policemen, hunters and high servants.

Above both these classes is an aristocracy composed of the proudest clans which have jealously kept intact the purity of their Sudanese blood, customs and traditions—the thoroughbred Mangbetus, Azandes, Amadis and Mambottos, who superintend all work, administer the country, exact tribute on behalf of the sultan, under his stern but usually very just rule, form his court, and supervise the most difficult phases of elephant hunting and capturing, as in the case of my friend Masoko, whom we are going to meet soon.

The amount of their responsibility in the affairs of state is generally in direct proportion to their nobility, and also to their wealth, which originally derived chiefly from the sale of slaves. Later it came from ivory, then very high-priced; and nowadays it comes from the cultivation of cotton, especially of the American variety called "upland," of which Belgian Congo produces some 50,000 tons a year.

The village that Ekibondo had founded at his first marriage, as every noble Mangbetu man still does when he starts his family, was as good a place as any in the Uele to study the life of this beautiful, lordly, artistically minded people, and we spent many months in its vicinity.

From the one round hut his father's slaves had built for Ekibondo and his first wife almost fifty years ago, the village has grown into a huge conglomeration sufficient to house all his wives, the in-laws living with them, his little children and, when they come to visit him, his grown sons and daughters and their own hordes of offspring. Also the hundreds of servants and slaves, several dozen strapping policemen, the hunters who bring him a continuous flow of heavy ivory and fresh meat, the always changing cohorts of dignitaries, medicine men, musicians and other artists who come in turn to give some weeks of their services to the court, and the remaining miscellaneous assortment of this household, which is considered to be reduced to very reasonable limits when it contains a thousand or so members.

Far from being haphazardly constructed through the years just to take care of increasing needs, the village is a model of practical planning. It is divided into various sections by thousands of gorgeous palm trees which assure each part complete privacy, protection from the scorching tropical sun and, at the same time, an abundant supply of valuable oil and fruits.

In the center is the square house with thick thatched roof and magnificently decorated walls of dried mud in which Ekibondo lives with whatever wife is at the moment selected for the honor. The interior of this house I cannot describe, for neither I nor any other stranger has ever entered it. Just as no outsider has ever been allowed to see the interior of the small communicating temple where the sultan retires to meditate and to ask the inspiration of the ancestral spirits whenever he must make a grave decision.

On one side there is a round clearing enclosed by thirty

huts, in each of which lives one of the youngest wives, under the constant, strict supervision of the head wife, who with her children and female servants occupies a big house of her own. Not even the sultan's master of ceremonies would dare to enter this clearing without his King's express order, for it is strictly private. Except when Ekibondo, in high spirits, and feeling the need of violent exercise, decides to step out on the dance floor, that is, on the fine sand with which the clearing is covered. Then the entire population of the village gathers there; a sort of palaver house standing in the center is filled with musicians and, to the tempo of a hundred horns, cymbals, tambours and gigantic tom-toms, the thousand-numbered household of Ekibondo abandons itself to an orgy of sounds and songs and intricate steps.

Vehement charges, dizzy pirouettes, acrobatic leaps, are alternated with brief moments of rest until the coolness of evening comes. And with it a gargantuan banquet of roasted elephant meat, baked cakes of banana flour and palm oil, boiled mixtures of beans and sweet potatoes, which, whenever possible, is enhanced by platters of locusts, and always abundantly sprinkled with a sort of highly alcoholic sour beer made by the long fermentation of cooked maize.

On the other side of the sultan's house is the square enclosed by the huts of the forty older, more sedate wives and by almost as many huts for visiting guests, courtiers and married children.

Beyond are what one might call the Commissariat—granaries, silos, and also huts for the servants and minor court officials—and the Department of Justice, which includes a brick building used as tribunal, a bigger one for the supreme

court of notables and, conveniently near, the jail and the policemen's quarters.

The tribunals and the huts of Ekibondo's wives and relatives all have spacious verandas, perfectly thatched roofs and walls of brick or dried mud, covered, as I have said, by colorful decorations on the background of whitewash. The ground all around the buildings is kept so scrupulously clean that we never dropped a burnt match or an empty cigarette package, but conscientiously stuffed them into our pockets.

Responsible for this cleanliness, as well as for the manual work of the unending building projects—the manufacture and baking of bricks, cutting of timber and bamboo and so on—are the prisoners. The jail is permanently filled with men who have not paid their tribute and have to work it out; offenders of tribal customs; disobeyers of their chief's orders; persons condemned for small crimes against property, for laziness or other assorted peccadillos, or perhaps simply for having thrown refuse within the palm-tree border.

Their lot in jail involves no cruelties or hard privation, but plenty of work, much more than any native of common origin would ever accomplish on his own initiative in three or four times as many days. But Ekibondo takes his own and everybody else's duties very seriously and tolerates no monkey business. Not even from his own wives, who have a jail of their own and who, in the very rare cases of infidelity, are generously walloped, then sent back under guard to their parents. C. O. D., too; that is, against the restitution of a rightful proportion of the price Ekibondo originally had to pay for them. This price varies from three to seven medium-size elephant tusks and six to fifteen ivory-handled, crescent-bladed

knives, according to the importance of the parents and, in lesser degree, to the youth, beauty and charms of the girl.

The eldest son of the eldest wife, then the eldest of the second, and so on, being the only ones in line for the succession, a sultan usually picks his first dozen wives with the greatest care concerning their origin. Ekibondo did so in his early years, marrying only maidens of the noblest clans. However, when he had got a good sixty of them and reached his fiftieth birthday, his fancy began to wander in less aristocratic circles. His succession having been more than abundantly assured by fifty-six first sons, he started the habit of getting out three or four times a year, followed only by a reduced retinue of some hundreds of dignitaries, policemen and porters, to visit less haughty neighboring tribes until he could find a new wife of proletarian origin but buoyant vitality and great natural fascination, buy her and take her back to his village.

There, a wife's life is one of peace and enjoyment, of some work and much comfort. All the heavy toil of the household is in the hands of servants. The wife cooks her own meals, however, and those of the sultan during the periods when she lives in his house, and contributes her part, according to the head wife's orders, to the preparation of the big community meals that follow dances and other festivities. She keeps her house clean, prepares manioc and banana flour, weaves mats, little hats and her own *megbes*. But the greater part of her time is devoted to tattoos and coiffures. Not only her own, but also those of some friend and close companion, usually from the same clan, who will reciprocate by painstakingly arranging her hair in the typical Mangbetu crown, or by beautifying her cheeks and back and breasts with intricate and painful cuts, patiently filled with a dark pigment and

closed again by stitches, so that the tattoo will be permanent and in high relief.

The very day that the head wife and a special medicine woman have helped her to become a mother, she goes to work on her baby's head. The fifty-foot braid of soft antelope skin which she has pleated in advance she uses to bind the child's skull from the forehead backward, all around, tighter and tighter. The operation is repeated several times every day, for twelve months, until the child's skull has taken the proper shape. The longer and more cucumberish it is, the better. For this means that the mother has lavished much care on the child and that she must have had many servants to allow her so much free time. Thus it is a sign of better birth, of richer and nobler family, for among the Mangbetu wealth and nobility always go together, in equal proportions.

This ancient custom of deforming the skull not only has a tremendous effect on the physical condition of the Mangbetu, but it also influences practically all forms of Mangbetu art. Clay pots, wooden amulets and musical instruments, ivory masks and statuettes and knife handles—everything which falls into the field of the Mangbetu's sculptural sense, has one theme, and one only—the Mangbetu head.

Not even a man of such intelligence as Ekibondo can satisfactorily explain when or why this custom originated. Of comic effect in shaven-headed men, graceful in young, well-groomed women, attractive in plump, carefully tended little boys and girls, it appears as a barbaric and useless cruelty when one sees it applied with heavy-handed firmness on the tender skull of a new-born baby.

Yet the Belgians, who tried to stop this custom as soon as

they felt in sure enough control of the Uele, had to revoke their ban after only six years, for sixty per cent of the children born during that period proved to be mentally defective, whereas the usual percentage of halfwits before this innovation was less than one per cent. And it immediately reverted to an insignificant figure as soon as the Mangbetus were left to follow again their traditional practice, which, for reasons not yet known to science, has seemed to be a factor in keeping the race miles ahead of any other of Central Africa in intelligence, good health, longevity and prolificacy.

Another Mangbetu custom that the Belgians tried to stamp out, and against which they never rescinded their sternest prohibition, was that concerning the funeral of a sultan. Tradition, probably based on the fact that women outnumber men three to one, and that only men of nobility can afford plenty of wives, decreed that when a sultan died, all his wives, sometimes as many as three hundred, should be sacrificed and buried with him in the same grave.

These horrible massacres have entirely stopped in the last few years—at least officially. But strange things still happen even today. During our last visit to the Uele, a Territorial Administrator, trembling with rage and fear of consequences to his career, told me what had happened at the death of Sultan Nembiliki.

Not trusting too much the word of the populations under his control, the Administrator suddenly arrived the day of the funeral, to make sure that no one else would be buried with the sultan's body.

Fifteen days later, he returned to the village for a palaver about taxes. Just before he left, he remembered Nembiliki's thirty-four wives. "Send for them," he requested.

"I am sorry," answered the new sultan, "but they are all dead."

"Dead?" The white man jumped up. "All of them? Of what?"

"Of some strange malady that no medicine man could cure."

"And where are they now?"

"In Nembiliki's grave," calmly replied the new sultan.

3.

The Capture of Albert

THE MESSENGER from the chief of the Mangbetu elephant hunters woke me early one morning.

"Come, Bwana," he urged from the entrance of my tent, "come quickly. For everything is in readiness."

I was ready myself in less than two minutes. During an expedition, the time for an elaborate toilette is in the evening—if at all. All I had to do now was to jump up from the camp bed and out of my pajamas, splash in a canvas tub of cool water, and get into fresh shorts and bush blouse, woolen stockings and high boots. I took my helmet, cigarettes, matches, the heavy elephant gun, a belt filled with cartridges as big as your finger, and we were on our way.

While I walked behind the messenger, I munched the tablet of chocolate my boy had run to bring me, shocked at my discarding even the thought of breakfast. It would have delayed me too long. This was the first time in all my years in Africa that I had had the chance of seeing the capture of a young elephant, and I was not going to miss it.

My guide was an athletic Mangbetu of low class. So low in fact, that his head had a normal shape. But what elasticity of muscle he had! What agility of movement, what poise and balance and dignity! Entirely naked but for the briefest of loin cloths, armed only with a strong slender spear and a

mean-looking, crescent-bladed knife, he walked lightly, swiftly, as if driven by his impatience for the thrilling, recklessly audacious hunt to come.

For three hours we did not exchange a word, or once slow down. I was ready to swallow my pride and ask for a short rest, when the man stopped. The monotonous thick bush through which we had marched parted before us to form a small shady glade, in the middle of which stood some spears, with a pile of native vegetable rope as big as my wrist beside them.

While I mopped my brow, my old friend Masoko, who on this occasion led the hunters, emerged from behind a huge tree. Without speaking, he nodded in salutation and made a sign with his right hand. Only then I saw his men. According to the inviolable tradition of the Uele—the country of all Africa richest in elephants—the hunting party was composed of four "frighteners," each armed with an ancient gun; eight "catchers," each reclining beside his coil of fiber rope; and four "binders," to whom belonged the heavier rope and the spears.

My guide, I noticed, was one of the binders. Already he was stretched out on the ground, like the others, motionless, fully relaxed. One of the frighteners, however, had instantly caught Masoko's gesture, and was nimbly disappearing in the opposite direction from which I had arrived.

I sat on a gigantic root protruding from the ground like a natural bench, and leaned against it my rifle, which by now had grown unbelievably heavy. Automatically I pulled out a cigarette, but I didn't light it. That queer silence meant that the elephants—a good hundred of them, according to my guide—were near, perhaps within two hundred yards.

I wondered about those men, so lazy in appearance. For more than a week, I knew, they had followed the roaming herd, studying the character and peculiarities of each of its members, living on fruits and roots, sleeping in the high branches of trees, constantly on the alert for a change of wind, continuously in danger of being caught alone, attacked, crushed to a horrible death by a bull in bad humor or an alarmed cow.

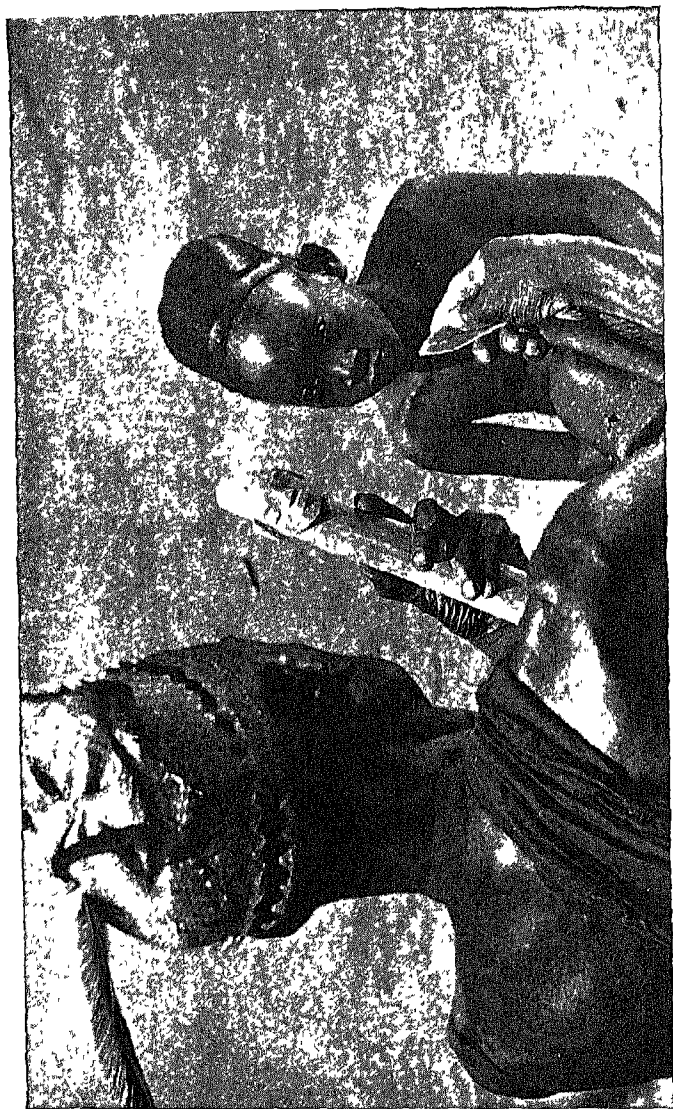
For the African elephant, the mightiest of all terrestrial mammals, is not only the most obvious link between today's world and the dim past of the Miocene and Pliocene times. It is a sagacious, intelligent, foxy creature, too, and one whose wrath, once aroused, is fearful.

Unlike its Asiatic cousin, which because of its smaller size and milder temper has become the pet of every zoo and circus, the African elephant easily gets into a state of all-destroying fury, which is made the more terrifying by its enormous bulk. The average female is nine feet high at the shoulder; a bull often tops eleven or twelve feet. Their tusks, which are an exaggerated development of the upper-jaw incisors, may reach to nine or ten feet in length. I myself have seen a pair, each of which measured 10 feet, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches on the outer curve, had a $24\frac{1}{2}$ -inch maximum circumference, and weighed 230 pounds.

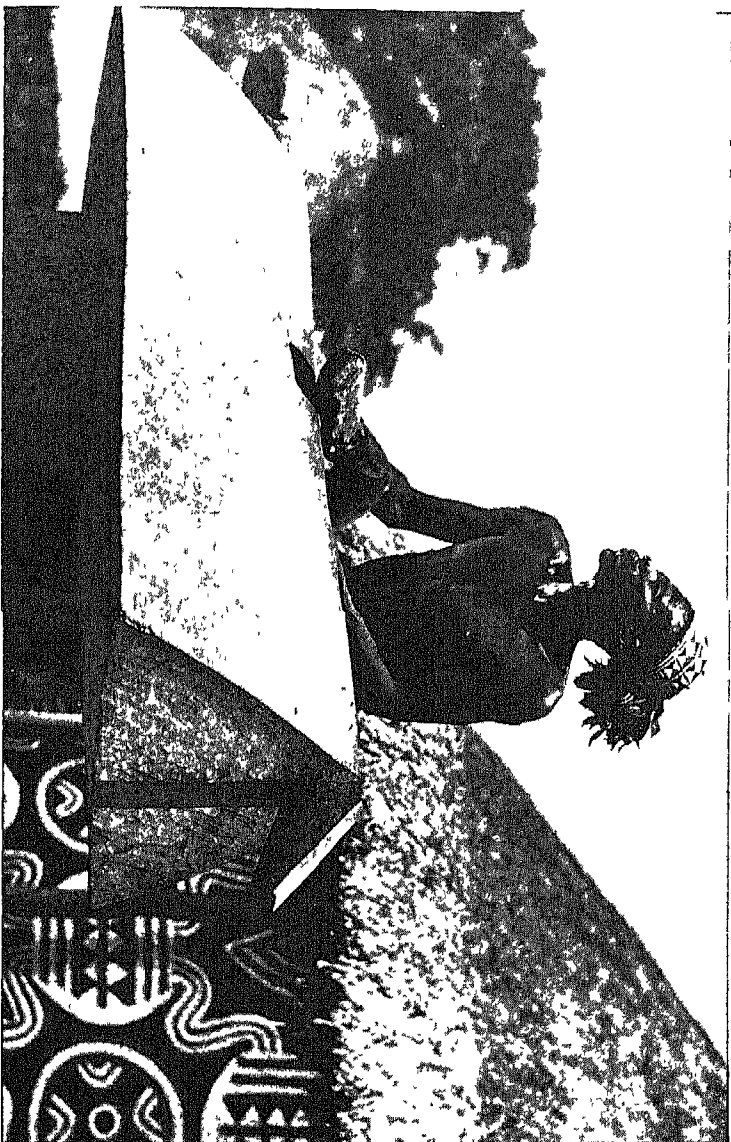
The average tusk is not quite so huge or so heavy. But whatever its size, it is a fearful weapon. Try to visualize a pair of them backed by seven or eight tons of infuriated elephant, imagine a hundred such creatures rushing in a concerted attack—and you will have a faint idea of the danger which, during almost every minute of the past seven days, could



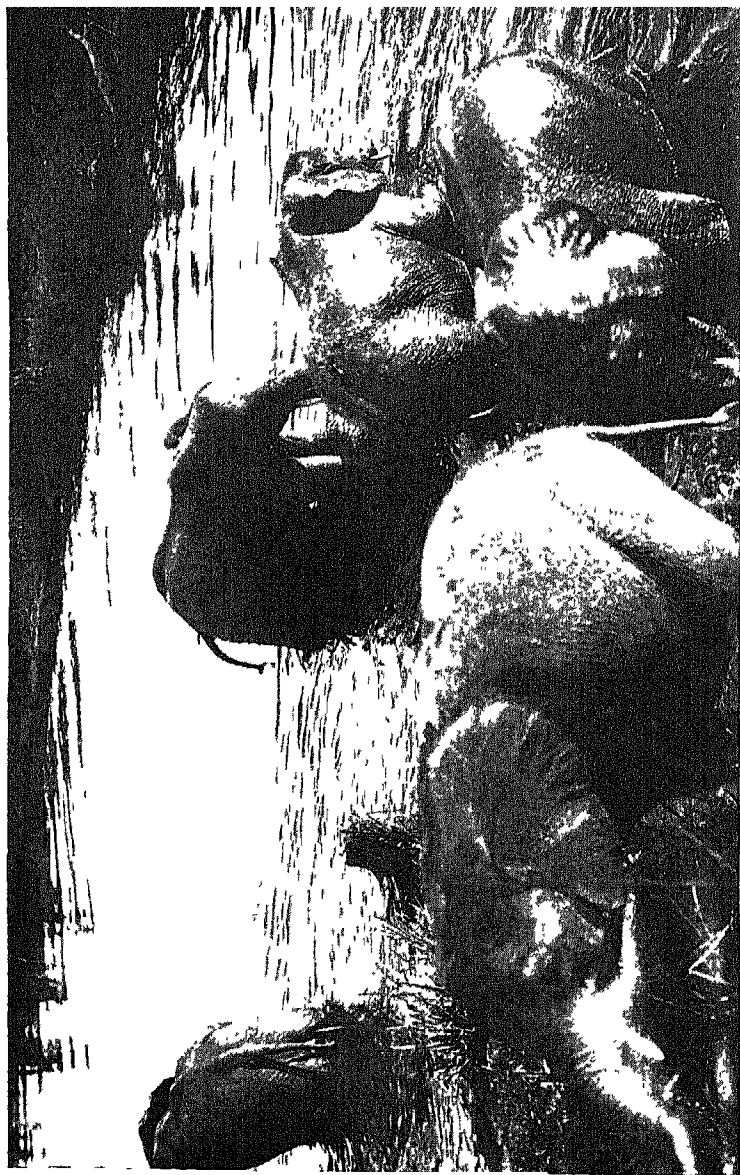
Some of Elibondo's wives pay us an official visit



A Mangbetu artist carves a musical instrument, with a young girl for his model



Mangbetu drummer (notice the beauty of the walls of the hut)



Albert the elephant and his companions

have been brought upon those seventeen men by a false move or the wrong kind of noise.

Yet these same men were now calmly awaiting, in an attitude of complete repose, a final signal from their chief. Then, relying solely upon their own profound knowledge of the elephant, upon their iron hearts, their hereditary adroitness and their muscles of steel, they would make an incursion into the very middle of the herd.

Their only chance of success would be in surprising the great creatures, in not giving them a minute's pause or an opportunity to understand what was happening, in appearing and disappearing unceasingly at the most unexpected places, with a faultless teamwork that makes the finesse of the bull-ring seem almost trivial. And this without stopping, even for a fraction of a second, until the herd is broken, entirely out of control of its leaders, maneuvered into confusion, panic, stampede.

At the thought of those seventeen men, whose four lone guns would shoot nothing but blanks, and who were about to dare attack those hundred colossi, my mind flashed back to an unforgettable memory—to the two men¹ who, in Mozambique, eight years before, had left one morning, cheerful and confident, on an elephant hunt. And to the ghastly remains of the same two men which I had found the following day, shortly after a bull they had been stalking had, judging by the tracks, surprised them from the rear. The white man's skull had been mashed and emptied by the thrust of a tusk, his inert body trampled into a bloody pulp. His black gun-bearer had been pinned to the ground by one of the elephant's forefeet, while

¹ See *Killers All!* McBride, 1943.

the terrible trunk had encircled his body and relentlessly torn it asunder.

The moment the scout slipped back into the open space, it was instantly alive with silent but purposeful activity. Everyone was up to listen to the few words he murmured to the chief. The two young elephants picked out by Masoko, one about six years old and the other about ten, were now in the most favorable location, he said. The wind was propitious and steady, the herd unsuspecting and widely spread.

Masoko thoughtfully looked ahead of him, as if studying with the eyes of his mind the ground beyond the inscrutable curtain of vegetation before us. Then his hand pointed out three directions. And the three groups of hunters—those with the guns, those with the light ropes, and the spearmen loaded with their heavy ones—melted away, each taking a different path. Masoko set out alone, and I followed him for quite a while. Then he motioned me to stop, and he disappeared.

I found myself on the edge of what seemed to be an immense plateau overspread with small trees, the nearest of which gave clear evidence of having been recently stripped of their most tender leaves. From my vantage point I commanded an excellent view, but for the moment I could discover no sign of beast or hunter.

It was not long before the hushed quiet was broken. From behind a group of trees I saw a great gray mass appear, followed by something moving low in the grass. The big elephant stopped. I heard a squeal, and the little something rushed into sight. It was a calf, not three feet high, I judged, and at once, holding its trunk out of the way by curling it

backward over its head, it butted between its mother's fore-legs, where the elephant's mammae are situated, and began avidly to suck with its pointed mouth.

I was so enchanted with the scene that I did not notice a group of five bulls walking toward the cow, until they reached her. Something was disturbing them, for though the wind was straight in my face and not even their exquisite sense of smell could detect my scent, they were all flapping their ears nervously.

A few more minutes passed; other elephants came into view.

Then I heard several distant gun shots, and more gray masses appeared, heading at a fast shuffle toward my left. Four shots, and a pause, evidently while the frighteners re-loaded their guns. Again four shots, nearer, on my right, and another pause. And all the time I could see other elephants milling around in agitation, quickening their pace, trunks and ears waving in infuriated protest, indignant trumpeting sounding here and there.

Now and then small figures leaped high up from the grass, waving their arms, brandishing ropes. They were the catchers, adding their shrill yells to the approaching sound of gunfire to confuse and frighten away some bulls too slow in following the flight of the others. Seven or eight elephants, before they could understand what was happening to them, were isolated behind a wide, thick belt of big trees. Toward this group I hastened as quickly as I could, as Masoko had explained to me that I should do.

The four gun-men seemed to be everywhere at once. Now they popped up out of the grass just ahead of me and set up a frightful din, shouting and shooting in the air and running

forward. Already I was near enough to see that the group of elephants was composed of a big bull, three half-grown females and two cows with their young—these latter the ones that had been marked for capture.

Highly developed as the elephant's sense of smell is, its hearing is not so good, and its eyesight is extremely poor. Now separated from the rest of the herd, confused by the sudden outburst of noisy attacks apparently materializing on every side, the pachyderms sought to escape, the adults running away at a good pace, preceded by the more agile half-grown and followed by the tumbling little ones, grunting and squealing with distress. The hunters were close on their heels, and I tried to keep up with them, the excitement of the chase making me unaware of heat or weariness.

Suddenly the eight catchers, whom I had last seen more than half a mile away, sprang out of the grass all around the smaller of the two young elephants, which was panting at the end of the procession. While the frighteners continued their noisy job of keeping the other elephants on the run, the catchers pounced upon their prey. One hunter seized its short tail with both hands, two others grabbed its ears, a fourth jumped on its rump, while the remaining ones accomplished lightning miracles with their coils of rope.

The little one trumpeted so desperately that its mother and her six companions stopped abruptly, facing their assailants in a state of evident indecision.

There was a threatening waving of trunks and ears and a hail of furious trumpetings in answer to the calls of the captive, which grew more and more frantic as the ropes already attached to its neck and legs were fastened to the trunks of near-by trees. This was the most delicate moment.

The frighteners were making enough noise for two dozen men. If the elephants got time to discover that only four human beings were between them and their imprisoned little one, they would charge and sweep everything before them. Masoko promptly appeared, cracking quick orders.

The four binders emerged, apparently out of nowhere, with their heavy ropes, and leaped to reinforce the shackles of the little one. And what they would tie could not be freed even by a whole herd of elephants. This timely reinforcement left the catchers at liberty, and Masoko rushed them to the assistance of the frighteners. Before the pincer movement of the new wave of yelling, gesticulating attackers, the elephants fled.

A word from Masoko and the little elephant, now safely bound, was abandoned to its hopeless struggle.

It was fantastic, incredible. Now, all around me there was a heavy, pregnant silence. As if by magic, Masoko and all his men had completely disappeared. In that sudden quiet, I was standing alone, not knowing what to do. There was not much to watch, either. All I could see was the backs of the seven elephants, still trotting away.

Abruptly, pandemonium broke loose again, a few hundred yards ahead of me. The Mangbetu hunters, the minute they had disbanded the herd, routed its more obstinate rear guard, caught and secured a young one, had started ahead to get another. Bending so low as to take full advantage of the limited cover of the grass, they had succeeded in overtaking the fleeing group. Now they were trying to repeat on the ten-year-old the same maneuver they had just brought to a successful end with the six-year baby.

I ran ahead. By the time I reached the new scene of action,

the second youngster had already been isolated and partially imprisoned. But its strength was more developed, its temper more aggressive. It was a tough customer, this one, and Masoko had to call back even the frighteners to try to hold and anchor it strongly enough.

The remaining six pachyderms grasped at once the change in the situation; moreover, by this time, they had had enough of this. And many other elephants had returned and joined them. Ears extended, trunks aloft, all together they followed the two indignant cows in a violent counterattack. "Hold fast until we come," their enraged trumpeting seemed to say to the young one. And he understood the message, felt encouraged, redoubled his efforts against the hunters.

Masoko was forced to send the four gun-men toward the oncoming attack in the hope of diverting it. But it was a determined one, and the chief soon understood that nothing could stop it or save the lives of his men except the release of the prisoner. He gave a raucous yell. On hearing it, the men let go of the ropes and ran, fanwise, at top speed, while the young elephant lunged forward in the opposite direction.

I was too tired to make a good flight. Realizing this, Masoko remained beside me, and pulled me down into the grass.

From there, I saw the elephants meet. The older ones surrounded the youngster. They chirruped to him. They patted his back and head with their trunks. They tore away the ropes still hanging from his neck and belly. His mother seemed to be in a special hurry. Impatient at the milling and trumpeting, she lowered her head and with a well-aimed thrust of her enormous tusks gave an energetic prod to the back of her offspring, who answered with an outraged squeak.

Then, keeping him safely ahead of her, she rallied the others with the command of a loud trumpeting. And, while I gave a sigh of relief, away they went on the trail of the rest of the herd.

4.

The Training of Albert

LATER THAT same day, the monitors arrived, two serious-minded, well-behaved, perfectly trained old females.

It was deeply touching to see the effect they made upon the little one, still grimly fighting against the tree-anchored, heavy cables. At first, he struggled harder and harder, loudly asking the older elephants for help. Then he seemed to pay some attention to the reassuring sounds coming from their trunks, which meanwhile caressed him behind the ears, scratched his great forehead, patted his sloping back in a friendly, soothing manner.

Soon he fell into a new mood. He remained immobile, sullen, as if stunned by the attitude of his elders, who, instead of using their immense might to free him at once, tried to calm him down, to tell him to cease resistance.

This was the chance for the Mangbetu hunters to approach as quietly as possible and, with the aid of the cornacks sitting on the heads of the monitors, to transfer one by one the ropes from the trees to the necks and bellies of the two old elephants.

When this operation was successfully accomplished, the little elephant could be considered safe. The old ones would keep him company and "talk" to him, so avoiding the danger

of his dying of a broken heart during that first night of captivity.

The following morning the long march began toward the Elephant Training Station of Gangala-na-Bodio, while the monitors alternated stern manners and tender inducements to make the little one between them refrain from attempting to charge ahead or stop stubbornly and refuse to advance, and while the hunters sang their strange chants. For they were happy at the thought of the reward awaiting them—a month's pay and the remission of a year's tax—and thankful to the god of hunting for having let them all return unharmed from the perilous venture.

The African elephant is distinguished from his Asiatic cousin chiefly by his more convex forehead, his enormous ears and great tusks, his hollowed back, the darker, rougher skin, and coarser teeth, the different number of nails—three on the hind feet and four on the fore feet, instead of respectively four and five—and by the prolongations with which the end of his proboscis, or trunk, is furnished, which are of almost the same size as the human finger and thumb and which can pick up small objects as they do.

From the utilitarian point of view, however, the most striking difference between the two types is that, while taming and training the Asiatic elephant has been carried on for ages, it was considered, until recently, impossible to train the African elephant.

It was Leopold II, King of the Belgians, who proved this to be false. Commandant Laplume, of the Belgian army, reminded his sovereign of Hannibal and the elephants, probably from Africa, which he had used to cross the Alps and

fight the Roman legions. What the Carthaginians accomplished a score of centuries before, claimed Laplume, the Belgians could repeat or, at least, attempt to do.

The experiment was to be of no little importance, especially in those parts of the Belgian Congo where sleeping sickness prohibited the existence of cattle. One elephant, moreover, would be able to do the work of ten to twenty oxen. Its maintenance would cost nothing, as it would continue to eat its natural food—the leaves and roots which the country produces limitlessly. It would demand little care, and not easily be subjected to diseases—as its great numbers, not even markedly diminished by the thousands of head killed every year by the natives, seemed to prove.

The monarch not only liked the project, but financed it out of his personal fortune.

Profiting by the legendary courage of the Mangbetu hunters and by their knowledge of the life and habits of the Uele elephant, Laplume succeeded in capturing some young specimens. Eight cornacks, or mahouts, were imported from India to teach their ancient methods of taming and training to the men of the Uele. Other stations were opened. Year by year larger numbers of elephants were captured, wider experience gathered, better results obtained.

More and more the captive elephant revealed itself as a placid giant, shy, kind-hearted, prepared to give everything when treated with patience and gentleness, asking for nothing but a caress, a friendly word and some hours of quiet to rest, feed its capacious stomach and splash in muddy waters.

How quickly and easily the elephant can adapt itself from the wild to the tame state, I had the rare luck of observing while watching the little one whose capture I had followed.

Albert, as the six-year-old had been christened at his arrival at the station, immediately felt better when he found himself in the midst of eighty other elephants. He was firmly tied to a couple of trees, but with enough slack to the ropes to give him some freedom of movement.

Within three days he learned to recognize the Mangbetu cornack who had been assigned to him. Instead of trying to charge, as at the approach of every other human being, white or black, he would flatten his huge ears against his shoulders, make some slow steps forward, extend his trunk as far as possible, daintily to take the tender leaves, the bananas, the manioca which the cornack would bring him every time he came near.

A few more days, and Albert began to get used to the sight of men. He would watch their movements with eyes still suspicious. But instead of trumpeting and charging, he would continue quietly to gather leaves with his trunk's "fingers" and place them alternatively in his mouth and on his head, as a protection against the sun. As for the cornack, Albert would welcome the man with a chirruping sound of pleasure, and let the Mangbetu scratch his trunk, forehead and ears.

Then the period of training started. First the cornack alone, later more and more hunters with him, would crouch near Albert and for several hours each day sing to him soothing, monotonous chants, all the while gently stroking his whole body with long leafy branches.

Gradually the men succeeded in getting closer without arousing Albert from his half-hypnotized state. They caressed him with their hands. They fastened a chain around a leg, and removed it. They tried a chain on another leg. They left the chains on longer and longer. They fondled him, cleaned his

little tusks, tickled his trunk, mounted lightly on his back, gave him good food from that position.

Step by step, Albert became completely fascinated by songs and caresses, learned to trust human beings. He began to understand the significance of certain words always repeated in connection with the same object or gesture. He came to sense clearly the intonations of the human voice, even to express impatience when his cornack stayed away from him too long.

As soon as Albert began to show pleasure when the cornack sat on his head, he was unshackled. Chains were still attached to his hind legs for the night, or when he was led to pasture. But while the cornack was with him, nothing bound him but his growing affection for the man and the sedate example of discipline and good behavior of all the other, older elephants.

Gently, quietly, without ever the slightest hurry or impatience, he was taught how to obey the touch of the cornack's hooked stick, when to kneel and lie down at the proper command, how to lift weights with his trunk, uproot small trees with his tusks, push against an obstacle with his forehead and put all his bulk to pulling a cart.

Comical, solemn, sensible and intelligent at the same time, Albert learned easily and quickly, willingly working from early morning until midday. He spent the afternoon at pasture in the shade of big trees, meanwhile making acquaintance with others of his kind, listening seriously to the teachings of his elders, and seeming to exchange mischievous comments with the youngsters.

When the hour came for bathing in the river near the station, Albert would immerse himself completely except for the

periscope of the end of his trunk, or would go along the banks in search of fresh roots. Or, in a hilarious mood, he might suck up water and discharge it on the back of an unsuspecting companion, or play the fool with a respectable old female until he himself would receive a punitive shower of mud on his big head.

Albert took admonishments and an occasional spanking in his stride. Unruffled, he would shuffle out of the water when his cornack told him that the time had come to return to the station for the night. But before getting in line with the others, he would unfailingly stop near me. Squealing with pleasure, he would rifle all my pockets with his inquisitive trunk, searching for the pinch of salt, the piece of manioca or the slice of bread he was sure I had hidden somewhere for him.

5.

Into the Jungle

FROM THE extreme eastern reaches of the Uele district, where the elephant country and the territories of the Mangbetus border the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, there is only one way to go south without getting out of the Belgian Congo. That is by the dirt road which the Belgians have managed, with unbelievable effort, to hew out of the 200,000-square-mile jungle which densely covers most of the unmapped country stretching on both sides of the equator, from the huge lakes and mountains of the Great Rift in the east, to the majestic, many-mile-wide Congo River in the west.

The brown ribbon that is the sole way of land communication unwinds interminably between high walls of forbiddingly thick vegetation, which only here and there, usually every ten or fifteen miles, have been pushed back, to give room for a small group of poor huts of dried mud and a modest garden of sweet potatoes, bananas, manioca and peanuts.

These are the villages of the Wandande tribes which the Belgians have recently transplanted westward from their original territories along the pestilential shores of the Semliki River, in order to save them as much as possible from leprosy, sleeping sickness and all the other tropical diseases which were decimating them.

This forced mass migration, however, was not dictated by

altruistic purposes alone. There was a more practical and realistic reason for it—which was to secure a certain amount of labor, inferior as it was, in order to open the road itself. For this immense territory was entirely uninhabited except for the pygmies, the copper-colored little creatures who have been, since time immemorial, the jungle's only human denizens. These small people would not dream of doing a tap of manual work for anybody, as their touchy pride and fierce independence forbid them any occupation except hunting.

The traveler along this road drives monotonous mile after monotonous mile, tedious day after tedious day, and sees nothing but these scattered villages half filled with miserable specimens of black humanity. Sometimes he may catch a glimpse of a group of four-foot figures, whom, at a distance, he probably takes for timid children, and who, at the approach of his car, *plunge into the vegetation and disappear.*

Once back in their jungle, they can be so silent in motion, they can in immobility blend so perfectly with their surroundings, that the sharpest ear and eye cannot discover them, even a few yards away—though their incredible swiftness, intensified by their invincible shyness, may already have taken them in a few minutes a distance that no white man could cover in less than an hour.

If the traveler, getting out of his car, tries to part the vegetation and advance into it a few steps, he will soon stop. He will feel pushed back by the overpowering silence of that apparently deserted world of steaming oppression and dark shadow. He will sense that that overgrown entanglement of gigantic trunks and immense lianas, of barbed bushes, thorny creepers, matted branches, dead trees and rotting leaves is a primordially wild realm into which he cannot lightly venture.

If he has good sense, he will quickly retrace his steps to the road's narrow zone of safety and light, lest in another minute or two he become hopelessly lost in that infernal green labyrinth where even the native never treads alone or too far; where many an overconfident white man has gone in, never to reappear again.

The chances are that the traveler, sobered and subdued by his brief experience, will resume his journey and go on for more monotonous miles and tedious days without seeing another trace of pygmy life. Back in his own country, he will probably remember the days he spent crossing that stretch of jungle as the most tiresome and disappointing of his life.

As a matter of fact, nothing on earth could be more deceptive than the appearance of silence and desertedness that the jungle presents to the superficial visitor.

Within its somber borders—vast enough to include the fifteen Southern states of the United States, and hitherto so little explored that even recent maps show wide spaces marked "Limit of Jungle Unknown"—there exists a densely populous world, which teems with strange creatures, with animals of absurd proportions, roaming among a flora such as could have been created only by one of Nature's wildest, most contradictory moods.

Here are immense, massive trees like ancient fortresses, with buttresses for roots that could give shelter to a host of soldiers; natural aerial bridges of cable-like lianas which stretch from treetop to treetop at dizzy heights; mushrooms as large as umbrellas, some of them of violent colors; and flowers which spread a heady, pungent perfume—and which are ready to grasp your hand as cruelly as the leopard's steely jaws. Here are parasites which, born as little plants of gor-

geous beauty in the high forks of a mighty tree, grow to twine around the great trunk a net of roots which slowly strangle and suck the tree to death, until they wholly assimilate it.

Here, too, are dwarf antelopes no bigger than a rabbit; pygmy buffaloes that, at full size, are no larger than a calf; and pygmy elephants whose largest bulls are no taller than an ordinary cow, but far more vicious than the giant elephants of the Uele.

In striking contrast, we find in this same jungle region, the giant gorilla, the largest and most formidable of the primates, which grows to such size that his foot leaves a print in which your footmark is like that of a small child. The giant forest hog found here is as high as a horse and perhaps twice its weight. And the goliath beetle, only one of unnumbered monstrous jungle insects, reaches the proportions of a small pigeon and is so hard you would think it made of metal.

In between the two extremes there are also creatures of more normal size, but most of them present striking characteristics that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. Among these is the handsome, tough customer with which, after many months of hell, I was able to become acquainted, and which later I named the Congo bongo. The jungle pygmies call it the soli.

It is a great antelope, as large as a large ox. It has a coat of bright chestnut red, with twelve to fourteen snow-white stripes encircling its body, and many silver-white lines and spots marking its head and limbs. It has a pair of enormous backward-bent, lyre-shaped, amber-tipped horns which, I was to learn to my sorrow, it knows how to put to the most shattering use.

Strangely enough, the soli, despite its gaudy colors, blends

so perfectly with its habitat, that, when motionless, it becomes practically invisible at a few feet. Moreover, this animal, the smartest and fiercest of jungle antelopes, has developed such cunning in evading pursuit, such ingenuity in extricating itself from the tightest spots, that it can elude even the pure pygmies, undoubtedly the best scouts, the finest trackers, the most persistent hunters I have ever met in my African career.

The most plausible explanation of the extraordinary keenness of the bongo's wits seems to lie in the fact that it is rapidly approaching extinction. Instinctively sensing the importance of the survival of each individual for the perpetuation of its race, it has sought the most inaccessible zones of the jungle. There, except for the brief mating season, each bongo lives as a fierce individualist, in complete isolation, as if to lessen the risk of detection and destruction.

Of all the thick, damp, thorny entanglements of the equatorial jungle of the Belgian Congo, those in which the Congo bongo survives are undoubtedly the least known, and the most impenetrable and treacherous. Here, to the usual heart-breaking arduousness of the jungle, are added the difficulties of a mountainous region—the endless climbing up and down; the slippery slopes, with many falls for the hunter; the depressing effects of high altitudes; the mortal danger of quicksands in the swamps at the bottom of deep valleys.

Yet these jungles which surround the Mountains of the Moon and are dominated by snow-capped Ruwenzori, 16,700 feet high, have their own beauty. Only, when you spend weeks marching through them, it is difficult to be aware of it. The jungle becomes a dreadful place, where you spend your time in motionless ambush or painfully violent pursuit.

Of course I realized, even before starting my quest, that I

was embarking on a difficult, almost impossible venture. For I was already acquainted with that chaotic kind of world. And I knew from experience that no one could attempt to go anywhere in that infernal confusion of violent, luxuriant growth without first securing the full cooperation of the pygmies, those amazing bits of primitive humanity, who, naked, diminutive and poorly armed as they are, manage not only to feel at home in that somber kingdom of theirs, but to get out of it a surprisingly happy, independent, almost carefree life.

But I had found that the earth does not hold a more unpredictable race than those four-foot pygmies. If they did not happen to like you, you could never manage to get in touch with them. They would simply disappear, knowing only too well that no one could do anything about it, for once in the depths of their jungle, they are as safe from you as if on another planet.

If they liked you, at the proper moment they would come to you. How they knew when and where, I never found out for sure. My impression is that their scouts, noiseless and unseen, watched every movement of the stranger entering their territories and reported to their chief. Then the chief, or sultani, discussed the matter with all his hunters, and, democratically, a decision was taken according to the opinion of the majority. If the vote was favorable, the hunters made their preparations to march toward the stranger's camp.

Not that they came straight away to you. Even if they knew you of old, they would first hang about, absolutely invisible, for several days, closely scrutinizing you, your companions, your native boys, observing your disposition, your behavior, everything that went on.

If everything proved satisfactory, finally the sultani would

appear. Followed by four or five of his hunters, he would glide into the camp—casually, as if they had just chanced to pass by.

The results of this "casual" meeting decided the future of the whole campaign. Twice I have watched men with African experience to their credit, who should have known better, show either too much eagerness or not enough patience. I have heard them ask too many questions, or explain too abruptly all their ambitious plans. I have seen the sultani accept presents of salt and tobacco, nod vigorous assent to the request that he return the following day with his whole tribe, and briskly depart as if in a hurry to go fetch his people. In both cases, I made myself unpopular by forecasting that the pygmies would never come back. And they never did, while my friends fumed with disappointment and indignation.

When a sultani wanted to do business, however, he would show his hand with disarmingly childish naïveté. Before the end of the meeting, he would drop all pretense. He would make a gesture with his hand, to call in the other hunters still concealed in the vegetation. He would see to it that all of them got their portion of salt and tobacco. He would give the sign of friendship and alliance by planting his spear in the ground, and crouching down near the little fire that one of his men instantly lit. And he would order another of his subjects to go and fetch at once the women, the children, the old ones—with whom, naturally, came all the meager belongings of the tribe.

That's the way things went when, having reached the village of Chief Bwanasula (about halfway between the small posts of Irumu and Beni) and abandoned the road from the Uele, I had persuaded Bwanasula to give me sufficient porters

and to guide me a day or so into the interior, to the stream which marked the beginning of the hunting territory belonging to Sultani Kotu-Kotu.

There I pitched my camp, paid off the chief and his natives, who were in no little hurry to get back to the road, and with my permanent boys began to go over my material, to enlarge the clearing, and especially to get re-acclimatized to the jungle, while patiently waiting for the pygmy sultani to show up.

Now, Kotu-Kotu and I were old friends. In years past we had hunted together during many a season. On every occasion, he and his men had proved themselves brave, faithful, trustworthy. And they, on their side, had shown appreciation and satisfaction for my way of dealing with them.

But in spite of this, I had to wait nine days. When Kotu-Kotu and his retinue finally made their nonchalant entrance, I felt sure that the pygmies had followed their usual procedure and kept a close scrutiny on my camp for most of those nine days. When the sultani's hand brought out of the shadow some thirty-five other hunters, when they all planted their spears and began to lap up my salt, only then did I let out a sigh of relief.

But I was careful not to mention the soli. Neither that day, nor the following one, when the remainder of the tribe arrived, and the women, after exchanging shy salutation with me and helping themselves liberally to salt, set out with the children to their usual task of building a new village.

This operation is simpler and much quicker than it sounds, for each family builds its own hut, which is made in less than an hour. While the men swiftly clear the ground, the children run back and forth with armfuls of flexible sticks and thin

creepers. The women plant the sticks in the ground, first one end, then the other, to form a series of parallel arches in one direction, then another crosswise. Each stick is deftly tied with a knot of creeper wherever it touches another stick.

Finally they collect the leaves of the *magongo*, which are as big as a towel, and cut the stem so that it makes a sort of hook, easily suspended at the proper place on the sticks. The operation is carried out from the bottom upward, as with a tile roof. Lianas are tied around to hold down the *magongo* leaves in case of strong wind, and the hut is ready—a semi-spherical construction with only one opening, the low arched doorway, which at night will be sealed by a big piece of thick bark, thus keeping the interior as dry and warm and smoky as it can be made by the slow-burning logs in the center of the hut, which are kept going all night.

I did not mention the word *soli* even during the following week or so, while the women got well settled in their new homes and the men again accustomed to that way of getting meat which consisted in bringing me face to face with a pygmy elephant and letting me shoot it with my gun—this instead of their own method of wounding it in the hunt with their poisoned arrows and spears and following it perhaps for days, until it finally died.

At last the sultani himself offered me an opening, by asking me what kind of *nyama* (meat, that is, game), I wanted to hunt this time.

Well, I said, more than hunting, this time I wished to take photos—"phutulas," as he pronounced the word—of as many animals as possible. I wished to watch the *nyama*, and to capture some of their young ones to take home and show to my people, who had never seen them and wanted to know

what kind of *nyama* roamed in the kingdom of Sultani Kotu-Kotu.

The old pygmy seemed very pleased. He let out a loud guffaw of pleasure, slapped his short thighs and shouted the news to all the others.

In the midst of this merriment, however, a suspicion dawned upon him. His eyes suddenly narrowed, he asked me exactly what *nyama* I meant.

"Why," I said in the most natural manner, "the okapi, the little buffalo of the jungle, the black leopard, and, of course, the soli."

The sultani looked straight at me. Then, firmly: "The soli," he said, "*hapana*."

Now, *hapana* means just "no." The way he said it made it sound more like "nuts." And he meant it, too.

For a moment I was afraid he would get up. If he did, if he gave his people the order to pack up and move, all my hopes and plans would be blasted.

"A man like you?" I hastened to put in. "Can you be afraid of a soli? A big antelope, yes—but, after all, only an antelope. Not half as big as the elephants you hunt every day. Not half as fierce as the leopard you face without hesitation. Not—"

"*Hapana*," the sultani interrupted me. "The soli cannot be intruded on. For he has great powers that the spirits have given him."

With the utmost gravity, he proceeded to tell me that the soli can at will transform itself into a tree in order to fool the hunter; can again become an animal to charge and kill the stalker at the first propitious moment—then once more fade into the vegetable kingdom to avoid pursuit.

Kotu-Kotu knew, too, of a soli which had jumped to the top branches of a tall tree and waited there in ambush until the proper moment, then had fallen on the unsuspecting hunter and crushed him to death. The soli, he said, will swim across any river without a moment's hesitation, and so swiftly that the human eye cannot follow it. Or it may descend to the bottom of the river and remain indefinitely, living on fishes, frogs and worms.

The sultani was so serious, the faces of his Lilliputian subjects, who had silently gathered around us, were so solemn, that I listened and took care not to smile.

I knew that these four-foot mites of primordial humanity were courageous hunters. With their ridiculous little spears and arrows, they coolly faced, almost every day of their lives, formidable monsters which I felt quite brave in sometimes approaching with a powerful rifle in my hand. And, fantastic as the sultani's recital seemed, how could I know what was invention and what might be perfectly true facts distorted by superstition, or disguised under the imaginative poetry of the primitive man? After all, since Stanley, on his way to the rescue of Emin Pasha, had first pierced the mystery of that region in 1888, several naturalists and explorers had exhausted themselves on the trail of the bongo.

And what had they found out?

On the British East African side, one of these adventurers had recently captured two young specimens of the Kenya type. But of the Congo type practically nothing had been learned. Some badly mauled skins had been obtained, most of them from native chieftains who had got them from pygmy hunters. That was all. And that was why I was there—ready to undergo any amount of hardship in order to discover what

others had not succeeded in discovering. To study a little-known animal called only by a long Latin name.¹ To bring back to civilization the first specimen ever captured alive, or perhaps even a pair of them, which could mate in captivity, and make possible any amount of scientific experiment and research.

No, I was not going to laugh at anything that Kotu-Kotu chose to say. Nor was I going to abandon my pursuit. Not if it took months.

¹ *Boocercus eurycerus cooperi*.

6.

Bongo Tricks

AS A matter of fact, it took me more than two months to conquer the last opposition of the sultani, of the elders, of the tribe and of each single hunter. During that period, I spent enough words of persuasion to fill volumes. I treated and healed pygmy children. I shot scores of baboons for the cooking pots of the pygmy women. I helped the pygmy hunters take revenge upon some particularly vicious buffaloes and elephants which in the past had killed members of the tribe. I made half a dozen long journeys to go and fetch from enormous distances loads of salt and tobacco, casks of bananas and baskets of manioc flour.

But in the end I overcame the opposition. And away we went, toward the farthest reaches of the tribe's territory, where no white man had ever penetrated and not even a pygmy hunter had ventured for years—the soli that were supposed to live there in sizable numbers were not to be intruded on.

Ours was a long safari.

The sultani, his forty-odd hunters and I represented the active troops. At a prudent distance my commissary followed, a handful of the least fearful among my native porters, who carried on their heads my drastically reduced baggage. Then came the silent, patient procession of some seventy pygmy

women, bent double under the weight of heavy baskets, cooking pots, sleeping mats and thumb-sucking babies, yet keeping a constant watch on the twenty or so half-grown children.

Though it took all my strength and will power to keep pace with the swift march of the pygmy hunters, the first days were a great thrill to me.

The farther we advanced, the more evident it was that the jungle had remained long undisturbed by human beings. Every little while small animals darted away in surprised panic almost from between our feet. Every time we crossed an *eedoo*, or glade, we found huge footprints not more than a few minutes old. It seemed as if the elephants and pygmy elephants, buffaloes and jungle cows, antelopes and gazelles of every kind, okapis, anteaters, wart hogs and giant forest hogs had been unable to believe that man was actually approaching their sacred retreats—and had left in a hurry only at the very last moment, just before the first scout stepped into the *eedoo*.

These signs increased and my excitement grew still greater when the sultani silently pointed out to me some blackened stones piled together. His gesture of explanation meant that, in the memory of man, this was the most advanced spot where hunters of his tribe had ever ventured and made a fire. No one knew what lay beyond this point. Before proceeding, each pygmy snapped his fingers toward the sky to invoke the protection of the good spirits, and murmured a magic word to keep away the evil ones.

From then on, the hunters grew even more serious, cautious and watchful than they had been before. I, too, had a sensation of entering into a new world. Mine was a feeling of elation. Those dark expanses of tangled jungle, through which we could proceed only by following the winding paths of ele-

phants or by carving our way step by step with machetes, were literally teeming with *nyama*. Ahead of us, to our right and left, we heard continuously the prolonged swish-swish of foliage parted by game in flight, punctuated by the sharp cracking of branches, lianas and small trees broken by the largest animals in their hurry to get away from us.

If ever there was a region where the soli should be found in some abundance, this was it. And here they would be less suspicious and aggressive. I began to dream that perhaps instead of one or two, we could capture several, of both sexes, of different ages. The photographs I would take, the observations I would make, assumed wonderful proportions in my mind. If only the pygmies would stick to the job a few days, I prayed, really put their hearts into the quest.

The following weeks, the dreariest and hardest I can remember, proved how misplaced were my worries.

As far as the pygmies were concerned, I could find no fault. The little creatures were real gentlemen. Little as they cared to guide me in that search, they had promised—and they stuck by their word. The trouble was with the soli. Every other creature abounded in amazing numbers in that virgin jungle. But looking for a soli trail was like hunting for a needle in a thousand haystacks.

Yet the soli was not a figment of the pygmies' superstitious imagination. The only thing to do was to persist. Let my heart hammer, my lungs gasp, my legs cry for mercy. Let my entire body be covered with clinging mud, with chilly sweat, with infected scratches, with smarting sores, with stinging bites. But push ahead—not heeding the vanishing hopes; not counting the effort and the hardship; paying no attention to the

grumbles of the pygmy hunters, to the groans of their wives, to the mutinous disposition of the porters. One day . . .

Well, the day came. And it is a day I shall not forget.

One early afternoon a pygmy scout suddenly materialized out of the vegetation, just before me. His face was divided by such a grin that I did not have to ask any question.

Instantly, we were all electrified. Fresh energy flowed in my body. Without saying a single word, the grinning scout turned about and plunged back into the green thickness. Like excited shadows, we all streamed after him.

He stopped before a chattering brook, and pointed. Our first soli footprints were there, all right. Unmistakable, and so recent that the brisk-running, crystal-clear water had not had time to blur the marks from the fine gravel.

It was just what I had dreamed of for so long. And it was the occasion to put into action the plan I had worked out during those unending days of march. There, near that good water, we could make what later I was to mark on the sketchy map I was making as "Bongo Camp #1." From there we could start every morning on the trail which we might have had to leave the evening before. From there, too, we could organize ambushes, drives or whatever the situation might call for. Then, as soon as the first trail had yielded all the results I could expect from it, we would move on until we found a second trail, and a stream near which to build "Bongo Camp #2," and start operations afresh.

Sultani Kotu-Kotu was well acquainted with my plan. Now his childlike hands went into action. First, they picked out Mangara, his youngest son, and Zutu, the old witchdoctor whose pupil and assistant Mangara was. Then the little hands spoke. "Remain behind," they ordered the two. "Wait here

for the porters and the women. See that they put up the Bwana's tent and build up the hunters' huts near the water. Speedily. And without any unnecessary noise."

The sultani's brown eyes glanced at me for approval. At my nod, he rushed up a slope, bent over double, the better to follow the track. Close after him, I dashed forward, my camera in one hand, my rifle in the other. Behind me slid the hunters, their spears raised for action.

The soli was only a few minutes ahead. None of its footprints were visible on the rocky slope, but the sultani found them at once on some soft ground at the top. Then the vegetation again closed, leaving only a pitch-dark corridor hewed out by the repeated passage of elephants. Into that tunnel we followed the still slightly bubbling trail.

The winding, black corridor went down. Then it went up and up. Then down again, down, down.

When its rounded end came in sight, a majestic, continuous roar surprised my ears. As soon as we were out, I saw what it was. Not fifty feet ahead ran a huge river, its waters dark brown with mud. Its shores, about half a mile apart, were flanked by wide strips of sand, very sparsely wooded—evidently marking the size that the river assumed during the season of heavy rains.

And there, in the sand, the footprints of the soli were molded as sharply as in plaster-of-Paris.

"This time," I thought, "we've got him!"

I was expecting the sultani to dart ahead with renewed energy. Instead, he let out a grunt. And—of all things—he sat down! He said not a word. Only, with his dark little forefinger he pointed out to me the direction of the tracks, which were going straight to the river.

The gesture seemed reproachful. It was almost as if he said, "Didn't I tell you—you hard-headed mule?"

Around us, in the heavy heat of the afternoon, there was no sign of movement. If there was any sound, it was drowned by the roar of the river. The pygmies had given up the hunt so thoroughly that they were starting a fire. Some of them were even looking around for lizards, rats, frogs—anything that could supply a little snack. As far as they were concerned, the soli now was hiding at the bottom of the river, peacefully feeding on fishes, and perfectly protected by those tons of thundering waters. Or else it was safe from pursuit on the other side of the river.

One supposition was just as crazy as the other. The river must be fifty or sixty feet deep in the middle, and the whirling current was so violent that no animal on earth could brave it.

Yet it was certain that the tracks went directly to the river. I followed them, sure that somewhere they would turn right or left—but they did not. They continued through the shallow water licking the shore, first on sand, then on mud, then on a little bank of gravel. Finally they ended on a slab of rock. This almost submerged long slice of stone, parallel to the shore, had a rough surface about two feet wide. And it extended so far that I could see neither its beginning nor its end. Beyond it, the bed of the river dropped abruptly from three to about five feet of depth. There, the muddiness of the deeper water barely allowed me to see the bottom. But I was practically sure that it bore no footprints.

At last I understood. I whistled to the sultani and he came running. At the water, he stopped. "Of course," I thought. "Wonderful as the pygmies are at tracking in the jungle, they

are no good when it comes to water. They hate it and fear it. To them it means crocodiles and poisonous snakes. Hence their comfortable theory about the fantastic ways by which the soli can escape."

I tried to persuade the sultani to join me on the slab, but he would not come.

I tried to explain to him my idea—that the soli had deliberately fooled us by reaching the stone, walking on it downstream or upstream, then swerving out toward solid ground again and galloping away. Kotu-Kotu just shook his head and laughed. His hunters joined him, and for a moment their guffaws were almost louder than the sound of the river. All they saw in my earnest words was an enjoyable witticism.

Yet mine seemed the only reasonable explanation. If it was, no wonder the pygmies feared the soli so much and attributed to it such magic powers. It would mean an amount of cold calculation, of almost human reasoning, such as I had never observed before in any other animal.

Two hours later, however, even the pygmies had to admit that I was right. Downstream, I found nothing. But upstream, just before the slab of stone ended, the tracks reappeared. They were so spaced and so lightly impressed, that even I could read what they meant. The soli had kept its head to the very end of its maneuver. It had left the river not at a panicky gallop, but walking slowly. It had avoided all noises that could attract our attention. Probably it had even kept a watch on us, with its hypersensitive nose and enormous ears, if not with its sharp eyes—while we were milling around and wasting precious time.

Naturally, I rubbed it in. The pygmies hate to be made fun of, more than anything else. The rest of that day they

almost killed me the way they went through the jungle after those soli tracks. They were practically breathing fire. And I, panting, sweating, cursing, was barely able to keep up with them. But the soli had a couple of hours' advantage, and we never caught up with it.

To complete the debacle, when evening was approaching and I was despairing about the possibility of walking another step, the tracks disappeared entirely—this time in a treacherous swamp. When the pygmies stopped at the edge of the oozy mud, I tried it with my boot. It was a foolish thing to do; and as I did it, my other foot slipped from under me. Suddenly there was no solid ground below my feet—only something horrible which sucked me down and down at frightening speed. I was already up to my armpits in the quicksand before the pygmies had time to flash their knives, cut a liana, throw it around me. Then—pulling all together—they extricated me from that murderous mess. A second more, and it would have been too late.

Yet, through those very quicksands, the soli had vanished. "To go and lie at the bottom," the pygmies again insisted.

After twenty-two days of tireless search all around the huge swamps, we finally came again upon its tracks. They were twenty-two days old, of course, and therefore useless. But they explained the new trick that the animal had played on us. Ending there, but starting only a few inches to the right of where I had fallen, was a submerged way through the swamps!

Once they got the idea, the pygmies checked their superstitious notions and their fear of the swamps, and again they helped. This time we proceeded with extreme prudence, and so, without further accident, we discovered the secret of

that hidden way. It was a ridge of solid ground which zig-zagged irregularly all the way across the swamps. The soli had known it. Proceeding with infinite caution, testing the ground step by step, the soli, guided by its wonderful instinct, had succeeded.

Needless to say, we never found that soli again. Even if we had, I can hardly believe I would have been so callous, so hard-hearted, as to harass a second time, such a fearless, indomitable creature.

7.

The Bongo and the Ribs

BONGO CAMPS #2, 3 and 4 remain in my mind as a nightmarish, long-drawn-out serial of fatigue and misadventures, of ever-new hopes and ever-repeated disappointments. In spite of every effort, the weeks produced no photographs, no captures. All that I gained from them was some shreds of knowledge about the character and habits of the soli, or bongo—its preferred foods, its arrogant disdain for dangers and obstacles, and the respect it inspired in all other denizens of the jungle, with the exception only of the equally rare and remarkable black leopard.

Not that my eyes ever succeeded in catching even a lightning glance of a grown-up bongo. That happened only later on, while we were working from Bongo Camp #5. Until that unforgettable day, I had to be content with what I could learn or deduct from the spores, the marks, the half-chewed remains that the sharp eyes of the pygmies discovered on the trail we were following, and from what plausible bits of detecting I could extract from the explanations—mostly supernatural and fantastic—which the pygmies gave of those tangible signs.

The food which the bongo preferred proved to be the same bark which the pygmies used in making their loin cloths;

and also the three-stemmed spikes of a kapok-like, six-foot shrub whose scientific name I never found out.

Many times I found proof that the animal relished, too, the charred remains of a tree burned down by lightning—a detail I had previously attributed to the imagination of the pygmies.

An undisturbed bongo would lie down during most of the day in a dense mass of undergrowth intertwined with vines and lianas, and would feed chiefly during the night. When pursued, it would try to put the greatest distance possible between itself and the hunters, keeping on the go for hours on end, pushing its way through the most incredible entanglements, sliding under unbelievably low obstacles rather than jumping over them—a procedure facilitated by the backward sweep of its long horns.

Naturally, toward the end of such an exacting flight, a bongo, strong as it is, must be exhausted. These are the only times, apparently, when a black leopard gathers enough daring to attack this formidable antelope—at least, such was my deduction. In several cases, I saw a black leopard's track cross a fresh one of a bongo, or run parallel to it for a time. But only once did the feline follow with the evident purpose of killing—and that was when it must have been informed—by the bongo's sweat, by its tired gait, or by some such indication—that the animal had spent most of its energy and fighting spirit and might therefore become an easier prey.

Little by little, I also came to understand why the pygmies had attributed such magic powers to the soli.

The tricks that our first bongo played on us were sufficient to explain their belief that a soli could disappear beyond a great river or below a swamp. The way our second, third and

fourth bongo outsmarted us a dozen times and in the end managed to make us lose their trails, proved that even if the animal did not change itself into a tree, it could exploit to an amazing degree the camouflage qualities of its coat, the faintest change in the wind, every exceptional feature of the ground—and could take the most unexpected advantage of our slightest mistake. Above all, what emerged from the whole painful, obstinate pursuit was the subtlety, the craftiness, the skillful maneuvering of which the bongo is capable.

Once, a male we had cornered in a ring of nets escaped us by mixing at the proper split second with a herd of elephants which we had caught in our drive and promptly allowed to go.

Another time, a female slipped between our fingers by swimming a short way downstream in a slow river infested by crocodiles—the only side we had left open, both because of the pygmies' antipathy to crocs and because I did not think it possible any animal would take such a deadly risk.

And again, when the mating season came along, we planted many wire loops around a glade that a pair of bongos seemed to like, and that we had sprinkled abundantly with salt, which almost all animals seek and relish. I even filed notches in the wire, to make sure that, once a noose was pulled tight, a notch would catch it and keep it closed, at least long enough for the pygmies to discover the prey and for me to rush to see a soli at last with my own eyes, and to take photographs.

And, sure enough, the female of the pair did get caught. A pygmy scout who was perched on the top branches of a high tree saw it happen. According to him, for a time the female fought valiantly against the noose. Soon, however, it proved too much for her, and she fell to the ground, as if giving up.

The pygmy was about to climb down and run for us, when,

to use his own words, "down from another tree, dropped her mate."

At once, the male seemed to take in the situation and charged against the picket to which the noose was fastened. Again and again it charged, but without result.

Then the great bongo turned against the female. He kicked her and kicked her, not wounding her, but certainly hurting her painfully. Finally, she could not stand the punishment any longer. Infuriated, and revived, she got up. For a moment she stood and quivered. Then, at another kick from her mate, she made a desperate effort. And—wah!—the rope of metal was broken, and the two bongos were crashing away—never to be seen by us again. The confusion of footprints, the battered picket and the broken wire seemed to confirm the pygmy's tale.

Bongo Camp #5, however, is the one which taught me the toughest lesson. The new track which had caused its erection was that of a huge male. The footprints were the largest and deepest we had yet found.

The animal was also the smartest we had met. Twice in the same day, it made us lose its trail. By then all of us—I not less than the pygmies—felt that we had to stick it out; that—cost what it might—we had to find that trail again and to bring about a show-down—or we would have to give up our quest for good.

For once, luck seemed to be on our side. Not only did we pick up the trail a third time, but at a place where the animal could not possibly escape us—near the confluence of two rivers, both swollen to a roaring violence by several days of rain.

Where the animal was hiding we didn't know exactly. But

that time we knew it was caught, between the impassable waters and our lines—a tough triangle which ended in the *eedoo* where I lay in ambush with Mangara and old Zutu. The base of the triangle was the larger of the two rivers. The sides were formed by long sections of nets behind which crouched my porters, all the pygmy women and children and a sprinkling of hunters. The other hunters, led by the sultani, were advancing toward me between the converging lines of nets.

From the rear, the bongo would hear the forward creeping of the hunters. From the right and left, it would smell the presence of many human beings. But no forewarning of danger could come to it from the *eedoo*. What little breeze there was, was blowing in our favor. Zutu and Mangara hid in such immobility that not even I knew their exact position. As for myself, I was prepared, at any cost, not to risk spoiling that unique setup by moving a cramped leg or scratching the most painful of a hundred bites.

The *eedoo* was the bongo's only way of escape. When it slid across that bit of open ground, I would snap one picture after another. Even if it was alarmed by the first click and trotted or galloped away, I would have time to get some good photos, perhaps even to shoot it. "I'll shoot him in the heart or in the brain," I thought over and over. For I wanted a perfect skin for the Museum. And never again would I have such a chance, nor the stamina, the patience and the luck to get myself in such a fortunate situation.

I had to stay as motionless and silent as my two companions. The wind was still good. But by now I knew the cunning of the bongo. The slightest movement or noise on my part might be enough to give our position away—and to ruin the

day. Another disappointment added to the hundreds we had undergone, and the pygmies, already tired out with so much endless work, would get out of hand.

How long I remained there I do not know. Even if it was only an hour, it seemed to me just a shade shorter than eternity. It was not only that sweat dripped down my back, that my legs were growing number and number, that my shoulders prickled with a thousand needle stabs. Even worse were the insects, crawling inside my clothes, biting my neck and hands, tickling my nostrils and ears.

All the time, I kept thinking, "Another minute—and I *must* cough or sneeze. A second more—*sol*i or no *sol*i—I will have to change position. And—oh, for a real scratching!" Yet I resisted, and kept on resisting.

"Just this one *sol*i," my mind was pleading. "Just this one!"

The next moment there came what I can only describe as a lightning series of explosions.

Without the slightest warning, the vegetation on the other side of the clearing parted. Out of it an enormous creature materialized. All I saw was the glistening of a bright, candy-stripped bolide surmounted by a formidable pair of corkscrew-like horns. In the time it took to drop my camera, those horns had twice flashed down and up. First Zutu, then Mangara were catapulted through the space.

Then, as my right hand was closing around my rifle, the horns descended upon me. An excruciating pain blasted the left side of my chest. As I somersaulted high in the air and crashed heavily through a dense mat of vegetation, my ears were pierced by the rapid hammering of hard hoofs galloping away.

The whole episode lasted not more than a couple of sec-

onds. But it left Zutu and Mangara like two limp bags of blood, pain and moans. As for myself, in the spot where an instant before a brand-new shirt had covered some healthy skin and three perfectly sound ribs, there remained little more than a ragged hole, and beneath it a most unholy mess from which blood spurted in alarming abundance.

8.

The Magic of the Bongo

THE CYCLONE had passed, and the glade was filled with a startled silence. My pain was excruciating.

Then the whole tribe swarmed in. Deft little hands efficiently took care of my wound. Dirty little hands carried clean water in cups made of a leaf twisted into a sort of funnel. Gentle little hands applied crushed herbs to stop the hemorrhage, and leaves and vines to hold the poultice in place. Tender, strong little hands helped me to my feet.

Similarly bandaged, Zutu and Mangara approached with the sultani. "You see, Bwana," said the latter, his face grave with sorrow. "The great soli had turned into a tree, to watch you and my son and Zutu. Then he again became a soli, to kill all three of you. Now he is nowhere to be seen. Once more he has become a tree. And never will we find him again among so many other trees. In a hurry, now, we must carry you to the camp."

I said, "Yes, yes—and thanks." But I was sure that, the way they had fixed me up, I could walk back. After all, I didn't use my ribs for walking. Only, we would have to go slow, and make any detour necessary to avoid bending. But first of all, why not go and give a look to the other side of the *eedoo*, at the point where the soli had charged out from the vegetation?

The pygmies shook their heads, but they humored me. Within a few minutes, I found out what the sultani had actually meant. The bongo, of course, had not shifted back and forth between the animal and vegetable kingdoms. What it had done was simpler, but almost as startling. The mud told the story as clearly as if in words.

Evidently the bongo had known all the time what was going on. Its approaching footprints, lightly impressed, close together and already quite dry, showed that it had reached the edges of the glade some time before, with slow, stealthy steps. Having properly interpreted the sounds from the advancing hunters and the scents from the people crouching behind the nets, it had known that it could escape only through the *eedoo*. Instead of being fooled by the hush that reigned in the glade, it had smelled a trap.

Any other animal would have been in a hurry to get away through that quiet open space—but not the bongo. Four deep, clear-cut impressions in the mud told that the great animal had remained there for a good half-hour hidden behind the thickness of green on the very margin of the *eedoo*, just as motionless, tense and watchful as we had been on the opposite side of the clearing—only so much more alert and intelligent that, despite the unfavorable breeze and the ring of enemies closing nearer and nearer, it had managed to find out our number and position, while even such wonderful hunters as Mangara and Zutu were unaware of its presence.

When the bongo had felt satisfied, it had taken another cautious step, then darted out with such a spring that its hind hoofs had left impressions several inches deep. The eighty-odd feet of clearing it had cleared in five leaps—two to fall

upon Zutu and toss him through space, one to dispose of Mangara, two to reach me and get me out of the way.

And triumphantly continuing its dash for freedom, it had crashed away, straight as a bullet, with complete disregard for the seemingly impassable wall of tangled vegetation.

Time mends the wound of the flesh, but not those inflicted upon a hunter's pride. And so it was that after some weeks of healing and convalescence, Zutu, Mangara and I, all three feeling as good as new, managed to persuade the others to resume the search for a bongo trail.

The pygmies' thirst for revenge, however, was not strong enough to withstand another exhausting succession of hunts, ambushes and drives. Soon the women began to tire of that unending moving, and building of new villages. Several of my boys fell ill, and barely managed to drag themselves along. Some of the pygmies dourly consented to carry the loads of the sick men, only as a favor to me, for that was not a hunter's job and the pygmies had no taste for it. And I had to admit that I was weaker than I had thought. The zest for the hunt had gone out of me.

Though I tried not to show my weariness, the pygmies, sensitive as all primitive creatures are, perceived it and grew even more discouraged.

Not even the finding of a new track, the sixth fresh one in more than six months, did any good. We followed it for hours—for hundreds of hours, it seemed to me. At evening we had to stop and look around for a glade in which to spend the night. When the sultani guided me to one, he pointed gloomily to a strip of mud. It was covered with human footprints—those of tiny feet and those of a couple of huge boots—my

own. Only then did I recognize the glade. We had crossed it that morning, an hour or so after we had found the new bongo track. And now we were back there, after the soli had kept us going the whole day. That was the last stroke.

"Bwana," said Kotu-Kotu's voice from the height of my belt, "the new sun will see the hunters return to their old territories."

I could not blame him, and exhausted, dispirited as I was, I was about to agree. Instead, out of sheer mulishness, I found myself saying:

"Listen. Why has this soli taken us around and around and back here again?"

Had it been any other animal the sultani would have given the right answer without a second's hesitation. But the soli had magic powers from the spirits, and who can dare even to probe what the spirits do? "No man can know," he answered sullenly after a while.

His mind was focused on the supernatural aspects of the situation, and he was not interested in what I had said. But I was, more and more.

"Didn't the track tell you it is a female?" I insisted.

The sultani nodded in detached assent.

"Well, then," I went on, "why should a female act this way? Because somewhere near here she has a little one. A little one so young that it cannot follow her. So young that she must come back at night to nurse it! That's why!"

A chorus of startled "Wah-Wahs" from the little figures crouching around the fire told me that my surmise seemed right to them.

Suddenly, all fatigue had dropped from me.

"And *now*," I went ahead with new enthusiasm, "*now* you

want to leave me? When at last we are on the track of a *maama soli* with a little one—just what we have tried to get all the time?”

The sultani shook his head sadly. “Again we may lose the track,” he said slowly. “Again we may have to go and go and go. For one moon after the other. Until more hunters are wounded. Or sick. Or dead. But the soli we never shall get. Not without a great magic . . .”

“A magic?” I jumped in. “Why, if a magic is needed, let Zutu do it. Is he such a poor witchdoctor as not to know what to do? And you—a sultani like you—have you so little power that you cannot order Zutu to make a magic? So little pride that you are going to abandon me and my men here, perhaps to die?”

By then I was feeling almost sorry for myself. “All right,” I said in a wounded tone. “You go back. Now, if you want to. But I and my men stay. For we are not cowards.”

And having made sure that my perennially scared heroes of boys had finished putting up my little tent, I retreated to it with as much dignity as I could muster.

As I dropped on my damp camp bed for a few minutes of thought and rest, the pygmies released all their tongues at the same time. Clicks and guttural sounds pitched high above the voice of the sultani. Women and children joined in with shouts and cries. The confusion was such that I couldn’t understand a word. Nor could I, in the midst of that pandemonium, do any thinking. But presently, I fell into a heavy sleep.

What waked me up, a couple of hours later, were waves of singing and music. Never before had I heard anything of the

kind, nor had I ever known the pygmies to make so much noise in that part of the jungle.

I asked myself if they had gone crazy. Or were they trying to scare away the *maama soli*? The moment I came out of the tent, however, I lost my fears.

Under the wide-eyed astonishment of my boys, gathered in a frightened group behind my tent, all the pygmies were singing together, while executing a sort of stiff-legged dance.

Leading the procession was Mangara—though I had some difficulty recognizing him, for he moved with his shoulders bent and the short steps of an old man. For a moment I took him for Zutu, his teacher and master. What he was looking for, I didn't know, but he went here and there, searching the ground as if for something lost, with the whole crowd following on his steps.

Suddenly Mangara bent down to touch the ground. Abruptly, sounds, songs and dances ceased. And the pygmies scattered in silent flight toward the darkest edge of the clearing, where they quietly crouched down.

As soon as he was alone, Mangara sneaked behind one of the huge trees at the opposite side. For a few seconds the place seemed deserted. But for the crackling of the fire and for the breathing of the porters behind me, there was not a sound.

The suspense which had been created was so powerful, almost tangible, that I felt a chill go down my spine. Then a strange creature appeared from behind another tree. It had a black, shining fur. It advanced on all fours with supple, feline motions. In that light, I thought it was a black leopard. At any rate, it *was* a black leopard's pelt. Evidently it had

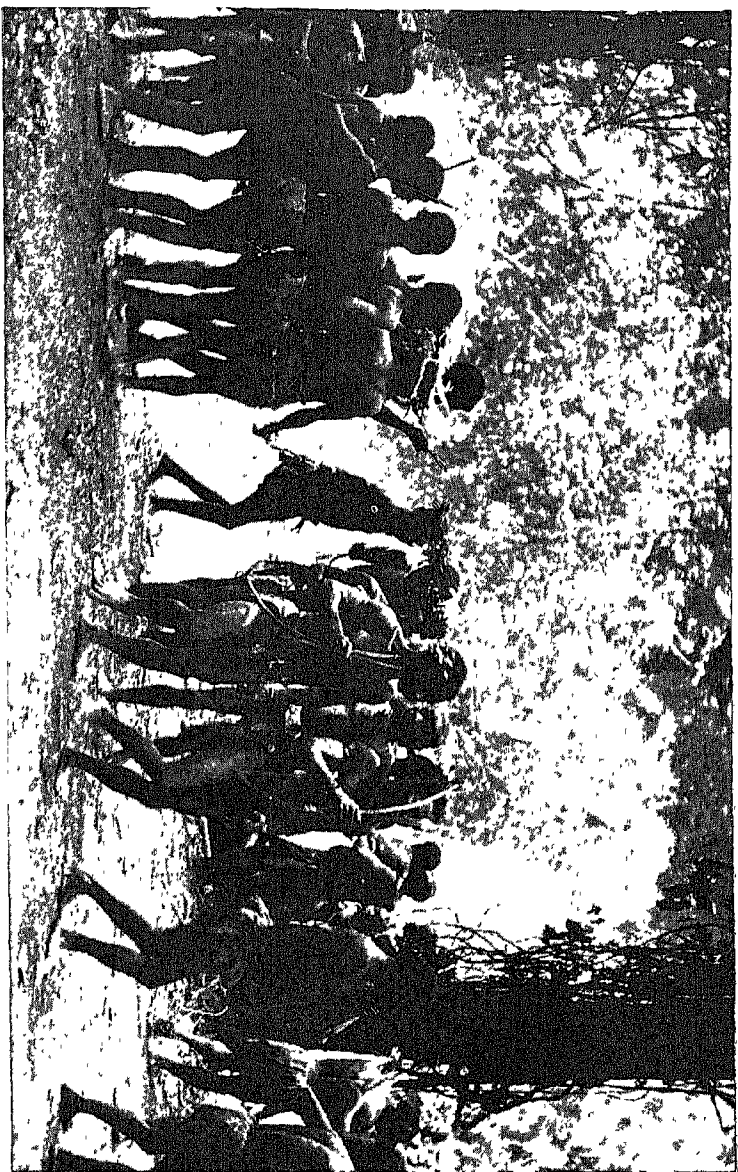
been produced from some woman's pack. And the pygmy wearing that perfect hide surely knew how to imitate the gait of the most ferocious of the jungle cats—the only one, it flashed back in my mind, that had been known to dare to attack an adult soli.

Captivated by the scene, now grotesque, now beautiful, which the play of flames and shadows made even more weird, I watched the "black leopard" sniff an irregular course across the clearing. Now, Mangara appeared and followed him, with a great show of caution. And—from the depths of darkness—the tribe again raised its voice, this time in a sibilant chorus of strange effect.

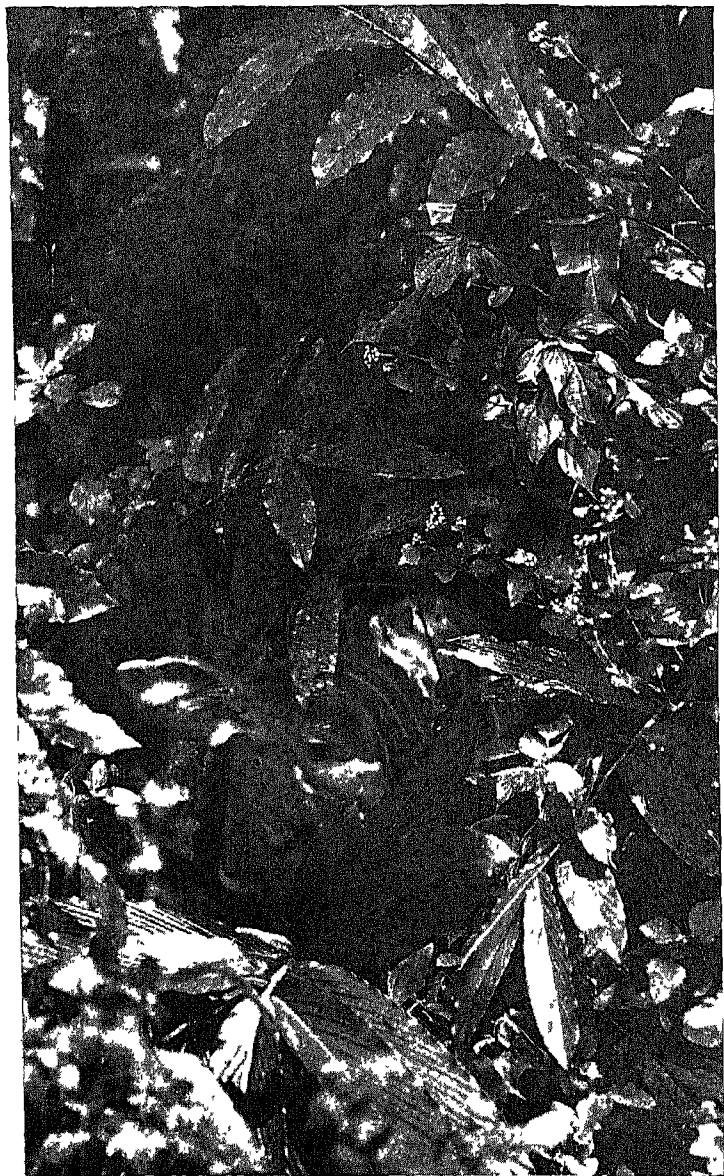
The "black leopard" came to a stop and coiled, ready to leap. Before him had appeared another pygmy, who held his arms above his head to imitate the horns of a soli. Then the two leaped on each other and the fierce battle was on. They fought like demons. While Mangara watched intently from a prudent distance, the tribe supplied the sound effects—feline hisses and snarls, the impact of horns and hoofs, even the labored breathing of two formidable animals locked in mortal combat.

By then, the significance of the ceremony had become clear to me. So I was surprised only by the realism with which the "black leopard" killed the great soli and began to devour it. When the feline had satiated its appetite, it gave out a spine-chilling rendition of the satisfied leopard's lugubrious cry, and slowly it retreated.

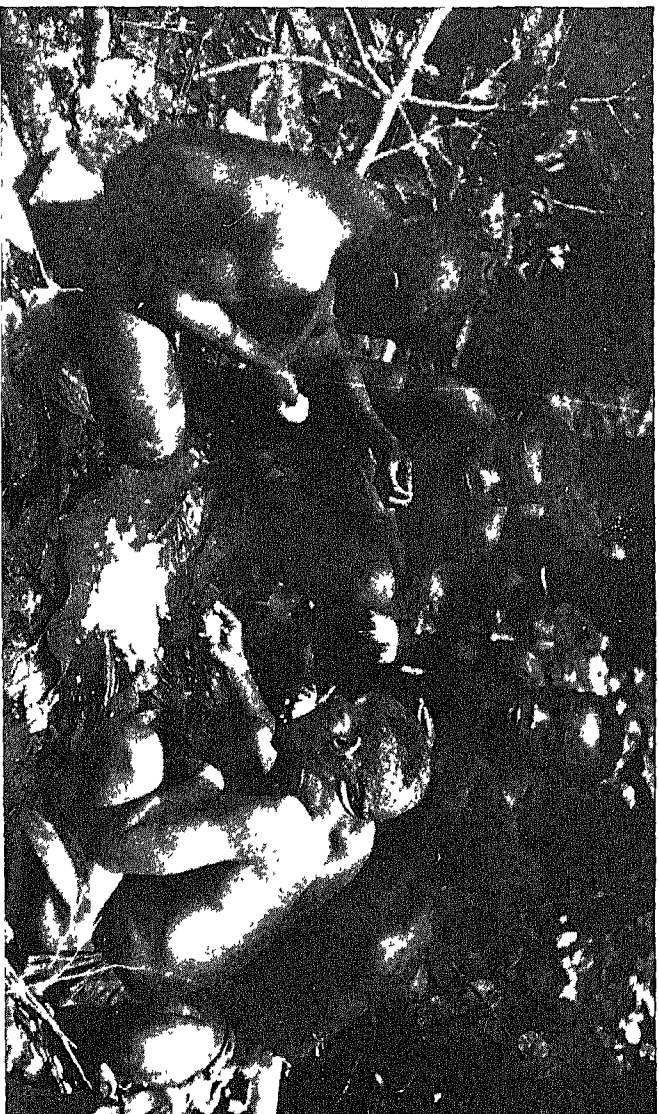
Now Mangara approached. Still acting the part of an old man, he bent several times over the motionless pygmy representing the dead soli, each time making the gesture of collecting in his hands a liquid and rubbing it all over his body. Evi-



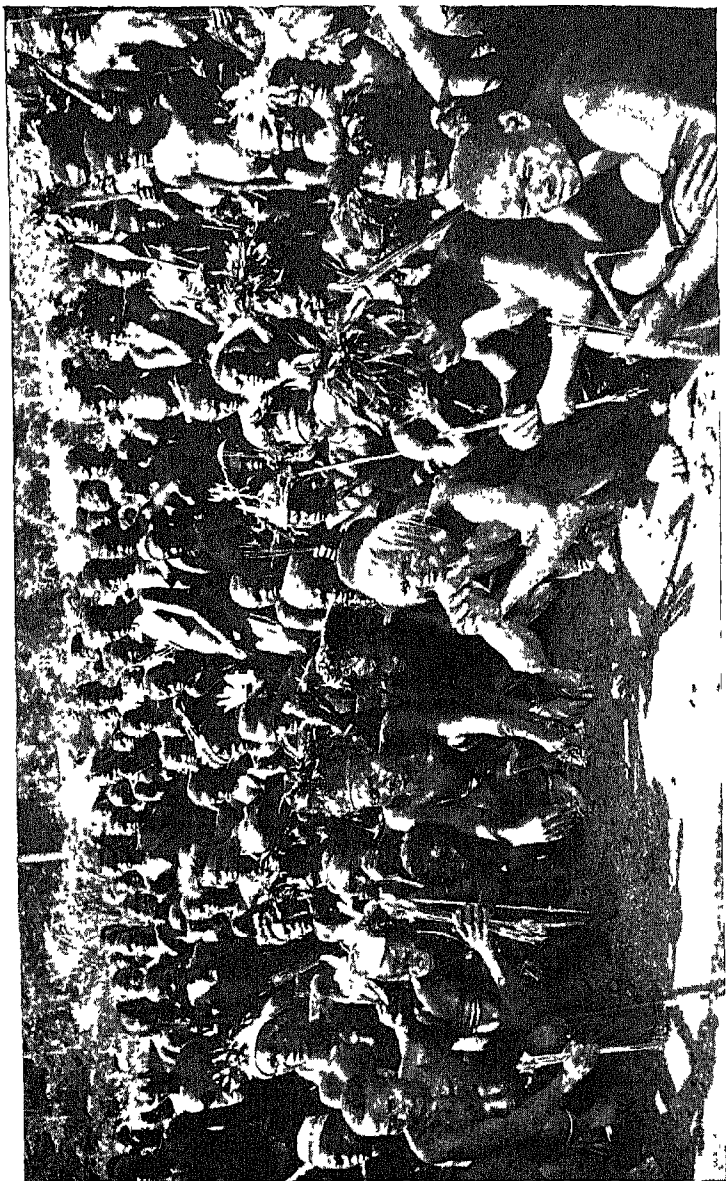
Pygmies in one of their magic dances



H'rabi M'lamu mingling so perfectly with the vegetation that she is hardly discernible even a few feet away



When big Bongo apparently vanishes into the river, the native hunters give up the chase and turn to eating



Bewildered natives listening to the author's voice issuing from the radio inside of Charlie's tent

dently he was anointing himself with the blood of the leopard's victim, so as to assume its odor and to lose that of a human being. But why was he mimicking so accurately the mannerisms of Zutu? Where was the old witchdoctor, anyway?

I asked the nearest of my boys.

He gasped. Then: "Wait, Bwana," he whispered, his eyes still riveted on Mangara. "Wait. For this is a great magic."

I turned my head again toward Mangara. He made a gesture of call and most of the hunters sprang out of the darkness. As he searched the ground all around the "dead soli," they followed him in a single file, as silent as ghosts, like hunters walking on a dangerous trail.

The boy again found his voice.

"You see, Bwana," he murmured, "Mangara is following the tracks that the *maama* soli made when she left her little one, before she was killed. And listen to him!"

The only sound in the clearing now was a plaintive, appealing "baa."

Of course, I had often heard pygmies imitating the call of a jungle animal. More than once I had with my own eyes seen a young one, taken in by the ruse, approach to within a few feet of the hidden hunters and discover the deception too late to escape.

But I had never heard this particular call. And Mangara was uttering it in so plausible a voice that, indeed, I expected a young animal to answer. When a low-pitched sound finally responded from the jungle's wall, I should not have been surprised if, conjured by some miraculous power of the absent witchdoctor, a young soli had actually appeared.

Instead, of course, it was another pygmy. On all fours, he

stepped timidly out of the vegetation. Instantly, all the hunters leaped upon him. They simulated a brief, successful fight. They seized their kicking, butting companion. They lifted him over their heads in sign of victory. A hundred shrill voices joined to celebrate the success. And Mangara, still impersonating Zutu, deposed at my feet the pitifully bleating "young soli."

"H'rabi M'lamu," he announced.

"That's a good name for the little one," I answered with equal solemnity.

But it was not enough. Mangara still looked up at me. From all around, hundreds of other eyes looked at me, waiting.

I racked my brain for what they could be expecting me to say or do. More on an impulse than out of reasoning, words came. "And, all my thanks are for you, O Zutu," I said to Mangara.

Eyes sparkled, grins widened, murmurs of approval rose everywhere. That was it! They were expecting me, too, to play my role in the magic ceremony.

"And now," I said, "we shall return to your old hunting territories."

A shout of joy—and swiftly the hunters lifted their prey, silently started on the return path. The women groaned and made the motions of lifting heavy loads on their backs. My boys grumbled and lifted imaginary loads to their heads. I made the gesture of taking up my rifle and fell into step behind the sultani.

With the utmost seriousness, the procession wound about the clearing a few times, until Kotu-Kotu came to a stop.

Spears were planted in the ground. Nonexistent loads were

dropped with sighs of relief. Feigning to be dead tired, I sat on a stump.

"And now that we are back," I said to the head of my boys, "bring out the salt and the tobacco."

At once, fictitious bags and baskets were ripped open. And the fictitious distribution of rewards began. One double handful to each child. Two to each woman. Four to each man. Eight to Mangara, as Zutu's assistant. Sixteen to Zutu, still personified by Mangara.

As the interminable operation proceeded amid the greatest gayety, I did not even smile. But, by golly, I was happy!

Of course, I was tremendously curious, too. Was old Zutu counting upon seeing a black leopard's track because of the magic—or had he actually seen one during the day? While I was blindly marching ahead from that glade back to the same glade, had Zutu discovered other indications which had entirely escaped me? Or, had he figured out that the long day's pursuit had exhausted the *maama soli*, so giving a surer chance to the leopard which he had found was after her?

I knew that to put these questions would be time wasted. Things magic must not be discussed, so that the displeasure of the gods will not be attracted.

Furthermore, I didn't care. My mind, despite the questions naturally arising in it, suddenly enjoyed an unprecedented sense of peace. It might have been the work of suggestion acting upon my tired mind—or the certainty that the ceremony would have a revitalizing effect on every single one of the pygmies. Zutu's decision, and Mangara's performance, might have been prompted by witchcraft alone. Or, more probably, by knowledge they possessed, consciously or not; or by instinct, by familiarity with the laws of the jungle, by a

shrewd balancing of cause and effect. Perhaps by an intermingling of all these, plus other things I could not even fathom.

I did not know, nor do I know to this very day. But I felt strongly that those devilish months were about to come to an end. Whatever the reason, I was sure that on the morrow everything would happen just as the ceremony had foretold, and success would be attained at last.

"And now," I said, "thirty-two double handfuls to Sultani Kotu-Kotu!"

Only then did Zutu appear, out of nowhere.

"That is good," he said, nodding grave approval. "The new sun will see the magic become true."

And—incredible or not—it did. Down to the slightest detail—except for the fact that Zutu himself directed the operations, instead of a Zutu-acting Mangara.

Before noon, the old witchdoctor led us to a bloody heap covered with clouds of black flies—the remains of the real *maama soli*, which a real black leopard had actually killed and half devoured at dawn. What blood there was around, Zutu used to cover himself from head to foot. Then he went ahead, following in reverse the early morning track of the female *soli* until he gestured to us to stop.

As Zutu slowly advanced a few more steps, as he rustled leaves and crackled small branches to simulate the unhurried progress of a huge animal, he uttered a *soli's* call, one that to my ear sounded even more natural than that of Mangara.

I held my breath—but not for long. A little "baa" of answer came. Copper-colored little bodies sprang from right and left. There were a few seconds of struggle. A great shout of victory—and a young female was deposited at my feet.

It was only a sweet baby animal, but my heart sang with joy. For to me it meant a unique, hard-won victory, a reward for all those months of effort, fatigue and persistence. The rarest denizen of the jungle, the elusive animal that the most celebrated naturalists and big-game hunters had in vain attempted to capture, was there at my feet, H'rabi M'lamu, *the first and only Congo bongo ever taken into captivity.*

9.

H'rabi M'lamu

"EAT WHENEVER your appetite calls for it. The whole day long, if you wish to, and during all the night as well. That is, every time you can.

"But eat slowly, and chew your food carefully, both at your regular meals, and any other time you feel like eating, when there is nothing else to do.

"Drink all you can—water only, of course; as far as feasible, clean and cool. In fact, as cool as possible. And take a good rest after each long, cool drink. One's appetite will only be the better afterward.

"The sun is a wonderful institution, in Central Africa, too, and very enjoyable at early morning and late afternoon. All the rest of the day it does quite useful things; it dries, illuminates, heats, fertilizes the earth, and so on. But while it is accomplishing so much, it doesn't need you. So, you stick to the shade instead, where you will keep fresh and comfortable.

"And keep as quiet as you can during these hot hours, leaving healthy strolls, pleasant walks, exciting runs and jumps for early morning, evening and night.

"Always avoid any effort which is not actually indispensable for your pleasure, your duties or your needs.

"If there is nothing to do, why move around? When you can lie down, why stand? If you can safely snatch a nap, why

waste energy by keeping awake? All the strength you save and accumulate will come in useful sometime, especially if you have to fight or run for your life—as your parents and the parents of your parents and all their ancestors have often had to do, since the beginning of time.

"Motor vehicles? Noisy and smelly devices they are, and usually as bumpy as the devil. But if one cannot avoid traveling in them, the best way is to take it easily, with philosophy. And to relax, to make oneself as comfortable as possible, without ever letting the beastly contraptions spoil one's appetite and sleep.

"Hygiene? Absolutely! A bath a day at the very minimum. Possibly two, one very cold before the sun gets hot, the second quite warm before the night gets cold.

"Something particularly dangerous? Yes, your own voice. Use it only when absolutely necessary. Everybody knows how many creatures have lost their freedom, even their lives, just because they made use of their vocal cords at the wrong moment, or in the presence of the wrong people. So shut up like a clam. You never will regret it.

"Human kind—it is quite a mess, and no doubt about that. The best way is to keep well away from it, as long as the matter depends upon your free will. But if circumstances force you into its company, be sociable and pleasant in every way at your disposal. There is everything to gain by this policy—all to lose by the opposite attitude. And you will find that men are not so bad, after all.

"But especially, and before everything else, don't ever worry. Whatever happens or does not happen to you, don't worry. What's the use of it, anyway? If you worry, even with every good reason in the world, all it does is spoil your appe-

tite, your sleep, your health, your strength. Does all this change the facts, improve the happenings or circumstances which made you worry? Certainly not.

"And, finally, even if you don't wear a hat, never get swelled-headed. Not even if a lot of more or less silly people crowd around you, saying that you are unique, and the most beautiful and rare and intelligent inhabitant of the equatorial jungle."

These are not the maxims and principles that someone, having reached the age of a centenarian, enjoys telling to an inquiring interviewer.

No. These are merely the actual habits and customs which H'rabi M'lamu followed and practiced every day of her life during the four months she spent in our camp. The words, of course, are mine. But the actions and the philosophy that the words attempt to describe are the results of those four months of close observation on my part.

How a baby specimen of the fightingest kind of jungle antelope could show so much sense, adaptation and meekness was something that never ceased to astonish me, especially considering the circumstances which accompanied her transfer from freedom to captivity.

Think of it! First, her mother's disappearance. Then the rough handling by those mysterious, strong-smelling bipeds. Then being transported from the depths of her jungle home all the way to the road—days upon days of journeying, suspended, and uncomfortably balled up, in a net attached to a pole that two of those bipeds carried. After that, being swallowed, but for the head, by the huge mouth of a green canvas bag.

But the worst came when the bag was lifted onto our truck and the engine began to thunder.

Yet H'rabi M'lamu did not worry. Never mind the racket, the jumping, the shaking. Daintily she began to eat, one by one, all the wild sweet-potato leaves of the bed on which she was lying. Every now and then she would turn her head to look for her body, which she could still feel attached to her neck, but which had completely disappeared from her sight. It was strange to see there, instead of her beautiful shining chestnut coat with snowy stripes, that green rough thing which had nothing to do with her. But why worry about it, when one couldn't explain it?

A hundred miles for a first drive was plenty. At our camp, she enjoyed the comfortable corral which waited for her, its good dry mud hut, its sunny patch of sweet potatoes, its cool water and shadowy corners. The white people were pleasant, and she was as sweet to them as ever an animal could be. The black people were good, but the difference was evident. She kept them at a certain distance.

Naughty-Face, the chimpanzee, had a very unpleasant smell and made useless movements and idiotic noises. But H'rabi knew those chattering creatures well and there was nothing new in that.

Boobi, the dog, was fun because he would never approach the palisade, but remained at a respectful distance, ears erect, head cocked on one side, and ran around in wild circles as soon as H'rabi, from behind the bars, would make the gesture of a friendly charge.

After a season of peace and quiet and growth, again the truck. A thousand kilometers of it, this time. Its thunder, as well as the bellow of the flat riverboat down the mighty

Congo; the quaking train to Matadi on the west coast; and the big boat to pre-war Antwerp, and the swift train to Rome—all these utterly failed to impress H'rabi. Despite the radical changes of climate and temperature, of scenery and surroundings, she continued her usual, sensible life—eating, drinking, sleeping, bathing when possible, never worrying or getting excited.

Then, in Rome, H'rabi found another bongo, a cousin from British East Africa, one of the only two Kenya bongos in captivity. It was a male; and for him and H'rabi the Zoo authorities at once took into consideration some matchmaking plans for the near future. "A very interesting experiment from the scientific point of view," they said. "The first time that it has been possible to attempt it."

I was not there to watch her. But I am sure that H'rabi paid not the slightest attention to all the fuss. With every attitude of hers, she would simply say: "Males! Well, better keep away from them, if you can. They are bores, they put on so many airs, as if it were a great merit and privilege to be a male! However, if circumstances force you into their company, well, better be sensible and nice to them. There is everything to gain by this policy. And, you will find that they are not so bad after all!"

There, in Rome, the little Congo bongo grew up to be a huge, magnificent creature. There, I hear, she has survived bombardment, evacuation, invasion, to become the delight of visiting G.I.'s.

And no wonder. For even if now they call her by a different, easier name, she still is H'rabi M'lamu—that is, "The Lucky Daughter of the Great Magic."

On the Trail of the "Living Fossil"

FIRST, DURING my long pursuit of the bongo, then during H'rabi M'lamu's stay with us, I became completely fascinated also by another animal, the okapi, probably the greatest freak of the equatorial jungle; also the most interesting and, except for the Congo bongo, the least known inhabitant of that region.

To begin with, the okapi, belonging to the family of giraffes, shares with them the peculiarity of not being able to emit a sound, because of rudimentary vocal cords. But, perhaps as a sort of compensation, it has the privilege of utilizing no less than four stomachs.

This, however, is only the start of its fantastic characteristics. Its legs you can compare only with those of the zebra, though they are more brightly striped in the upper part and wear a snow-white stocking from the knee down. Its body, almost black on the back, reddish on the flanks, pure silver on the belly, resembles that of a big antelope. Its neck, rich dark brown, is that of a horse and has a stiff mane not unlike a horse's mane. Its hoofs and tail are on the ox pattern. Its tongue looks like some twisting, headless, two-and-half-foot blue snake.

Its eyes are blue; large, gentle eyes when the animal is at peace, but glassy and sinister in moments of danger or fury, and possessing the extraordinary, convenient ability to rotate independently, like those of a chameleon, so that it can look in two opposite directions at the same time.

In the four months during which our little bongo grew accustomed to contact with man and to eating food that could be supplied during her long voyage to Europe, I found out that the best way to recover from excessive fatigue was to keep on the move, and that, once one quest was successfully ended, the proper thing to do was to start on another, on the theory that, having learned so much on the previous one, the new one would be as easy.

What fooled me was the evident abundance of okapis. In spite of all they had told me at the Colonial Ministry in Brussels about protecting the okapi from impending extinction, in spite of the heavy fines and punishments for anyone who should wound, kill or capture one of these "so rare survivors of an almost bygone race" without having first obtained a practically unobtainable special permit, one only needed to have a pair of eyes and to make a long enough march to find out that it was all bunk. Having crawled, galloped and tramped through the jungle for weeks on end, and having slowly acquired the pygmies' trust and confidence, I had concluded that the number of okapis whose footprints we saw in one day, or of those which, according to the mysterious but infallible grapevine, were killed in one week by the various pygmy tribes, was greater than the number which so-called competent authorities believed represented the entire okapi population.

The reason for this discrepancy was simple. As I have already explained, a white man has no chance in the jungle if he cannot secure pygmies for guides and porters from the natives of one of the villages along the road. This, of course, has been done over and over again, by travelers, officials on furlough, and plenty of others. Few of them appear to have realized, however, that their "pygmies" were not the pure pygmies of the interior, but pygmoids, that is, products of years of intermarriage between real pygmies and usual natives.

Every chief is prepared to produce, for a substantial compensation, a handful of these pygmoids. They range from the light copper-yellow of their pygmy ancestors to the coal-black of some of their Bantu forefathers. Their stature may be anywhere between the four foot six of the pure pygmy and the five foot eight of the average Wandande.

Along the road are the Wandande, the poorest specimens of the Bantu race, transplanted from the desolate shores of the Semliki, where they had been for centuries the victims of horrible sicknesses, decimated by slave traders based in East Africa, and further bled by the crimes of cruel secret societies. Now, in a more healthful climate, they seem to be improving somewhat. They are more easily controlled by the territorial authorities, aided by well-organized governmental and missionary medical services, supplied with seeds and plants by the agricultural department, and are slowly increasing in numbers, improving in health and cultivating bigger and better gardens.

Next to them is a zone which roughly parallels the road on both sides for a width of anything between one and three days' march. This is the home of numerous little clans of

pygmoids who hunt there, not only for themselves but also for the natives on the road and for every white man who wishes to get a taste of the jungle.

Beyond the pygmoids are the immense hunting territories of the true pygmies, the boundaries of which the pygmoids never approach while guiding a white man, but only when they are by themselves, and then only for bartering. As for the farthest limits of these undisturbed territories, nobody knows them. All I have learned for myself, after having persuaded Kotu-Kotu and other sultanis of pure pygmy tribes to take me into these territories, is that they are enormous, that they are traditionally divided among the various tribes and that they extend to other, still more isolated zones which are protected by taboos that no pygmy likes to break.

This being the situation, it is easy to understand the contradiction between the actual abundance of okapis and the belief that they are extraordinarily scarce. The simple fact is that okapis stray only occasionally into the strips near the road, where they have long since discovered that they are likely to be trapped by the natives, hunted with the arrows and spears of the pygmoids and even shot by the guns and rifles of white men.

When one has the means, the knowledge, the endurance, the time and the luck to be taken by the pure pygmies into their own territories, he immediately sees okapi tracks—they are as common as those of pygmy elephants and buffaloes. And if one can get a glimpse of a taboo zone, as I did more than once during my quest for the bongo, there is no doubt left. In those natural preserves, which in all probability the wise men of the pure pygmies protected with convincing taboos simply to keep them as rich reservoirs of *nyama* for

the generations to come, there are enough okapis to fill with good meat the bellies of all pygmies, pygmoids and other natives, to bandage and heal with belts from their strong hides all ensuing indigestions—without any noticeable decrease in the numbers of the animal. Yet of all the zoos in the world, only one can boast of an okapi in captivity—and that is at the Bronx Zoological Gardens in New York City.

Because it is unique, this specimen is invaluable. But if you see it, you may be disappointed by its meager, melancholy appearance. This particular okapi, whose history I know well, was captured by pygmies when it was only a few months old, relayed to pygmoids and brought by them to Buta, a Catholic mission not far from Stanleyville. Ever since, this okapi has been kept imprisoned in a small cage or palisade. It has been raised on unnatural food and subjected to terrific changes in climate. It cannot give you even the faintest idea of the majestic appearance, the huge size and fearful might which such animals normally attain in their own natural world.

Let me add that whatever knowledge I have acquired of these splendid creatures, I have had to earn, bit by bit, during years in the jungle. When, at the head of a well-organized, painstakingly prepared expedition, I left America to attempt to study, photograph and capture the Congo bongo, there was little that I, or anyone else, knew about the okapi—except that it had every right to be called a "living fossil." For it is almost undistinguishable from the samotherium of the Pliocene age, a prehistoric creature vanished from the earth some fifteen million years ago.

Perhaps, in those distant ages, Africa and Europe were not yet separated by the Mediterranean. Probably they still had the same climate, flora and fauna. Certainly the samotherium

had a wide distribution then, and its petrified remains have been unearthed as far north as the island of Crete. But some cataclysm ended those remote ages, and in recent times, at any rate, the habitat of the okapi has been limited to the central part of the thick jungle of the Belgian Congo.

For that reason this bewildering creature escaped the attention of science until a few years ago. And that is why, with the exception of the Congo bongo, it has remained for so long the least known of all African animals, and the one most surrounded by legends and mystery.

Long ago travelers and explorers began to hear from the natives tales of an animal half zebra and half giraffe, extraordinarily big and strong, eating only soil and flowers; an animal which hid itself in the darkest depths of the immensities which no one had yet attempted to penetrate. Everyone considered these tales as myths, creations of the imagination of savages. Only in 1900, through a fortuitous combination of circumstances, was definite information brought to light on the existence of this curious beast.

Of this first discovery I happened to learn some hitherto unknown details, even before my expedition reached African soil.

Among the passengers on our ship was Archdeacon Lloyd, one of the oldest, most respected pioneers of the Congo. He was returning to his mission in Boga, on the Belgian side of the Semliki River. It was he who, before the turn of the century, during a similar trip, had given the first information about the okapi to Sir Harry Johnston, already well known at that time for his research work in British East Africa.

Mr. Lloyd happened to say that the mythical animal resembling the zebra and the giraffe actually existed; that he



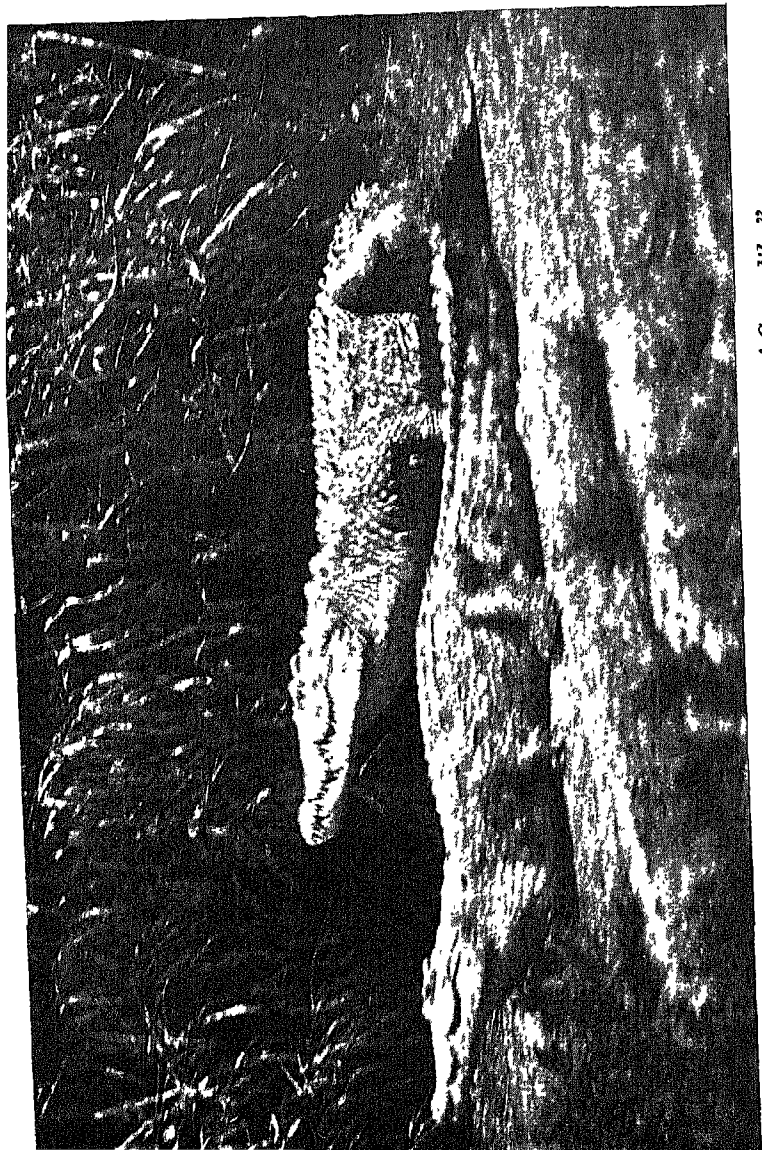
The making of a zenru (hunting pit)



An okapi finally falls into a wired zemu



The okapi within the palisade



Specimens of the crocodiles that infest the "River of Crocodiles"

himself had once caught a glimpse of one; and that he had several times seen entire skins in the hands of chiefs and witchdoctors who treasured them, believing they possessed magical powers.

On the basis of this information, Sir Harry Johnston immediately prepared an expedition to the edge of the jungle. And there he found confirmation of Archdeacon Lloyd's statements. But, although he tried every possible method, the scientist did not succeed in bagging or even in sighting a single okapi. He was obliged to content himself with collecting from the natives as many bones and pieces of skin as he could.

Later on, Mr. Karl Ericksson, a Swedish officer in the temporary service of the King of Belgium and one of the first Administrators of the Kibali Ituri region, sent Sir Harry two skulls and a complete skin. These were sufficient for Sir Harry Johnston to announce the discovery, the description and the classification of the animal, which Prof. Ray Lankester, a well-known British zoologist, was to name *Okapia johnstoni*.

After that date, the okapi succeeded in remaining almost completely immured in a mystery which was only accentuated by its infrequent appearances before the eyes of the world.

Not until seven years later did the first photograph of a dead okapi appear. And not until nineteen years later was the first live specimen, captured by pygmoids and accustomed to captivity at the Buta Mission, sent to the Zoological Gardens in Antwerp, where it died after a few months.

At the time I set out on my expedition, not even photography had been successful in bringing the slightest light upon the life of the okapi. Naturalists, colonists and officials had tried, but not one of them had managed to obtain a single picture of the okapi alive and free.

By the time I captured the little Congo bongo, my repeated efforts had not produced the slightest result. By the time H'rabi was ready to be shipped, I was wild with impatience. During those four months I had moved my camp a few miles northward, from the dominion of Chief Bwanasula to that of Chief Inghiresa, and two days' march westward, from the territory of Inghiresa's pygmoids to the central part of the territory of Kotu-Kotu's true pygmies. There, far from the road and the frequented zone along it, I had built a huge base camp, a whole little town of my own, composed of dozens of tents and well-built huts, which occupied most of a naturally huge clearing, which I had even further enlarged.

From that spot, all I had to do to find a fresh okapi track was to scramble through the undisturbed jungle for half an hour or so. By following scores of them and by spending hours on the high branches of trees bordering glades which okapis frequented, I was able not only to catch several glimpses of unsuspecting ones, but also to snap several shots of them on three different occasions.

My luck had been extraordinary. But what photographic results did I have to show for it? Nothing but some film barely showing a nebulous form which it took a lot of will and imagination to identify as the vague shape of the head or some other part of an okapi's anatomy.

At last I came to the conclusion that I was wasting my time. Good as my cameras were, sensitive and fast as were the negatives and lenses I was using, I had to go back to America to find or devise something better, infinitely better, so as to overcome that appalling lack of light, that general uniformity

of green tones, and the disastrous influence that the humidity exercised even on the best protected gelatine.

And in America I unexpectedly became a short-wave radio amateur, or a "ham," to use the usual term. It proved to be an experience I wouldn't have missed for anything—one which not only gave me a glimpse into an entire new world, but which ultimately contributed in large measure to bringing me victory on the okapi front.

11.

The Birth of a Ham

AT A CHANCE meeting in New York, I made the acquaintance of Mrs. Dorothy Hall, of Springfield, Long Island, who is one of the most experienced and popular short-wave radio amateurs of America, known to thousands of hams the world over.

"An expedition like yours *must* have a short-wave station," she told me. "You could communicate with America any time you wish—give news to your relatives if they are worried about you, send out an SOS if you need something quickly. If you take with you enough spare equipment, you can communicate at any time with one of your men elsewhere in the jungle. And tell me, how often can you get or send mail out there?"

"Well," I said, "most of the time twice a month, if we are lucky—if we are not too far from the road, if the mail truck doesn't break down, if the rains haven't washed away a bridge."

"There you are. In the Belgian Congo practically every post office is equipped with a short-wave transmitter and receiver. Well, once you are recognized by the government of the colony, you have the right to make a schedule with the nearest post office. Every time you want to send a telegram, or one comes for you, instead of waiting weeks, maybe

months, you just read it into your mike, or listen to it from your receiver. Or you may have an accident and need a doctor in a hurry; you get short of movie film or other urgent supplies and want to send a truck the moment the shipment arrives."

I didn't need much convincing. I had sometimes thought of the matter before, but I had always been stopped by the fact that the apparatus was so heavy, cumbersome and unreliable.

Now, apparently, most of these obstacles had been overcome. But—during my brief visits to New York, I had already forked out thousands of dollars. I had purchased the best movie and still cameras, costly lenses and telephotos, cases of the latest, most sensitive films and exposure meters, filters, Wratten lamps, developing equipment—a whole photographic arsenal.

With the difficulties of photographing the okapi foremost in my mind, I had even built several contraptions of my own, to click pictures by remote control, to have an animal automatically snap shots of itself when it tripped on strings laid across its most used path, to have flares ignited at the same time. In addition, I had acquired three Kohler power plants, self-starting compact generators that would produce all the A.C., 110-volt juice we could ever use in the jungle. I had bought a recording machine, and mountains of assorted material, and had secured the valuable but expensive services of a cameraman, an assistant cameraman, a mechanic and an electrician.

In other words, I was practically broke even before starting back for Africa—where it's a sheer fallacy to believe that life costs nothing, just because you pay natives in francs, and

pygmies with salt. But Mrs. Hall was not to be discouraged. She jotted down names, addresses, prices. The latter I had thought would run into thousands, but instead they were reckoned by hundreds.

"But isn't it a terribly complicated business?" I said. "I could learn, but I haven't time to take any courses . . ."

Mrs. Hall laughed. "You don't need any. In the United States you would have to take an examination, but not in the Congo. I'll give you a booklet or two. Both transmitters and receivers will come to you with full instructions. All you have to do is to read them and get some practice. In a few hours, you and your electrician will be familiar with it all."

The "few hours" actually stretched into several days. But how could Mrs. Hall foresee the havoc brought by the chameleon whose intrusion I will presently relate?

Mrs. Hall offered to make her W2IXY station our "mother station," that is, the one which would watch out for us, take our messages, spread through the earth's ether our latest news, give us counsel in case of trouble and so on. The Belgian Government gave us the permit to operate, and allotted us the name of OQ5ZZ for our station, OQ5 being the international code for the Belgian Congo, and ZZ our own letters of identification.

It was 1938 then, and nobody thought of war. The hams considered our problem one of great moment and rose to the occasion *en masse*. Hams are of every kind and age—high school boys and professors, truck drivers and lawyers, representatives of almost every profession and business. They all called to be of service, even to go on errands for us if we were short of time. Never before had I seen so many different kinds of people animated by such *esprit de corps*, so gener-

ous in wanting to share their knowledge, their experience.

Of course, all of them gave us suggestions, too, about equipment. And the name that cropped up all the time was "Hallicrafters."

I learned that the word was formed from part of the name of Bill Halligan, a ham gifted with a genius for adventuring in short-wave radio, and from the word "crafters," used to symbolize the craftsmanship which each individual ham had previously put into building his own equipment, and which Bill Halligan had harnessed into a factory system of hand-made production.

The results, according to every ham, were little short of miraculous. If we stuck to Hallicrafters, they said, we shouldn't have the slightest trouble in operating our OQ5ZZ in the Belgian Congo.

The question of size still worried me. But when the cases with the two Hallicrafters receivers arrived and I opened one, out came a compact little beauty, not any larger than the usual table radio set, with only a few dials and knobs, and solidly enclosed in a case of thin steel, for resistance to humidity and rust.

I had acquired the general idea that our OQ5ZZ could send out those mysterious waves in every direction. All we had to do was to plug in a cable from one of the power plants; plug in the proper end of the antenna; give time to the set to warm up, and watch a few dial-hands. As soon as they moved and steadied to a certain point, and others begun to wag, all was ready. Down went a switch, and we spoke into the microphone, for the whole world to hear us. Up went the switch and voices would pour out of our Hallicrafters' streamlined loudspeaker. A twist of the dial to the right or left, and

hams from all over the United States, and multitudes of hams from other nations of the globe would be speaking to us. It was simple as anything!

What happened when the moment finally came, is something that I am going to relate in some detail. I have given some space to the circumstances leading up to it for several reasons. First, because out of this strange mixing of the pre-historic and of the ultra-modern, out of this combination of our researches on the "living fossil," and our use of the latest thing in short-wave outfits—the same Hallicrafters which in the war were to be the backbone of vital communications of most Allied forces—we obtained complete success in the scientific field. Second, because our Hallicrafters contributed much to the making of a movie film which covered most of our work on the okapi and some of the more striking phases of our life with the pure pygmies of the Kibali, released by Warner Brothers under the title of "The Perils of the Jungle."

And, finally, because I hope that many readers of this book may feel encouraged to seek and find actual, thrilling, yet everyday adventure for themselves, by joining, with me, as soon as complete victory is gained and freedom of the air re-established, the confraternity of radio amateurs. Any new convert that my experiences with short-wave radio can gain for it will undoubtedly feel like a friend toward me, just as, ever since my first acquaintance with them, I have felt toward Dorothy Hall, the Hallicrafters organization, and the hundreds of "never seen intimates" of OQ5ZZ. Then we shall meet in the air, those newly acquired friends and I, and together enjoy the thrill of exploring the world's waves and ether lanes.

Adventures of a Congo Ham

THE FATEFUL moment finally came when, having reached Stanleyville, we camped in a plantation about two miles from the town, in order to clear through the customs all our new material, to check and reorganize it properly for the safari to our base camp, to enroll all the extra boys we now needed and to make the last arrangements with the Belgian authorities of the Province of Stanleyville, which includes the north-eastern part of the Congo and therefore the entire portion of the jungle where the okapi lives.

We all had plenty to do. But the minute the boxes of OQ5ZZ reached camp, Charlie, the electrician, and I could not resist opening them. Boxes 43 and 45 contained the two Hallicrafters receivers and their loudspeakers. Boxes 44 and 46 housed the two transmitters, each with a set of spare parts. Every box was fitted with a hinged, locked lid, thickly padded inside and impressively marked outside: "T.G.A.E.," meaning Tenth Gatti African Expedition; and "Keep This Side Up. Radio. Fragile." Which meant that every native porter, with the wonderful gift they all have for carrying everything the wrong way, would always insist on keeping that side down, and would be sure to drop these particular cases oftener and harder than any others. Just the same, the sight of all that wonderful machinery was comforting.

"Don't worry," said Charlie, caressing a receiver. "They are too good and strong to break. Only—when do we try them?"

Now that we had come to that moment, I suddenly realized my abysmal lack of knowledge. I had not the faintest idea of how to start, and didn't particularly relish the thought of beginning with some foolish blunder.

"Listen," I said to Charlie. "I have an appointment now. And who is the electrician, anyway? So you get everything ready. Only, I think that after all Dorothy Hall has done for us, we must let her be the first to contact us, the first to receive our signal, the first to speak to us, don't you?"

Charlie agreed heartily.

"Today is the 15th," I said. "A week from Saturday is the 25th. We won't be ready to leave until the 31st. So I am going to cable Dorothy Hall that we will be on the air on the 25th at midnight, which is 5 p.m. in New York. The Stanleyville wireless officer says it's the best time for transmission. And ten days will give Dorothy plenty of time to alert all her ham friends. We will make an inauguration of this station that people won't forget."

Charlie was enthusiastic—except for a small detail. He had already figured out exactly the direction in which the great V antenna should be stretched in order to be beamed as nearly as possible toward New York. But between the 200-foot legs of that V stood several antheaps as big as good-size hills, and thickly covered with trees. The instruction book said there should not be any obstacle within twenty feet below the legs, which would work best at about thirty feet from the ground.

It seemed extravagant to move thousands of cubic feet of earth for such a purpose. But the Belgian in whose plantation

we were camping said he would be only too happy to see the gigantic antheaps go. It being the slack season, he could even supply us with hundreds of native laborers—whom, naturally, he expected us to pay. Charlie said that, working hard, it could be done in ten days. So I said O.K., and went to town to send the cable to Dorothy Hall.

True to his word, by the 25th Charlie had everything ready. And we knew that by midnight of that day Dorothy Hall would be listening, and hundreds of hams would be frantically fiddling their knobs and dials, in a world-wide competition to catch our signal first.

On the 29th, a native from the post office bicycled to our camp and delivered a cable from Dorothy Hall. "No signal heard," it said, "either here or by hundreds hams who communicated with us. Have you forgotten schedule you made by telegram?"

Forgotten the schedule? As if we had not sweated and panted in agony, with the Hallicrafters receiver faithfully shouting out of its loudspeaker all those hundreds of friendly voices, one after the other, calling and calling us—that first night and every night since, while we were unable to send out a single word!

It was as if a gag had been pushed into our mouths, while our ears had gained a superhuman sense of hearing. For the last five days and nights, Charlie and I had done nothing but coax, threaten and curse those transmitters. We had switched from one to the other. We had changed all the parts for which we had spares. I wouldn't say that we had done anything especially competent or intelligent to activate that ethereal voice of ours which was so inexorably muted. But we surely had tried. We had knocked on each tube, blown

through every hole, pricked with a stick every single one of the two million wires visible, moved the set around, even sent boys up trees to move the "legs" of the antenna around.

During those five days and nights, we had slept and eaten only when nearing collapse. The rest of the time, when we weren't listening to those tantalizing calls from all over the world, we had gone on shouting into that mike until we were black in the face.

"Here is OQ5ZZ, the Tenth Gatti African Expedition in the Belgian Congo, calling America," one of us would say, while the other did everything we could think of with switches, knobs, dials and plugs.

"Calling America! Here is OQ5ZZ calling W2IXY. Hello. Hello . . . (blank—blankety—blankety—blank. Blank!) . . . Here is (blank—blank—blank!), calling America from the Belgian Congo. Hello. Hello, America! Come in, America!"

The dial hands, which should have moved to a certain point and steadied there, could not be persuaded to show the slightest sign of life. And the others, which should have remained immobile, would shake and wigwag diabolically.

On the 30th, having finally given up the struggle, I went into town to attend to all the business I should have taken care of during the previous days. While there, I sent off a cable to Dorothy, briefly recounting our misfortunes and concluding with the statement that our transmitters weren't good for anything.

Then I went to see the District Commissioner. He was a huge Belgian whose stonelike face had always seemed to me incapable of smiling. That day, his usual solemnity had van-

ished. He pumped my hand enthusiastically. He was actually laughing when he offered me a chair.

"I really must thank you," he said, when he had regained his normal composure. "I thought I knew English well, but during the last few days I have learned more new curses and bad words from you and Charlie than any book could ever teach me."

I was speechless for a moment, and felt my face getting red. I said something about our transmitters not working, the "skip zone," the antenna directed toward New York, in the opposite direction from our camp than Stanleyville . . .

"I know," he laughed. But each night I got every single word of yours—in my radio set, just an ordinary one. Every word you said into the microphone—and every word you two said between yourselves. It was the best show in my life, I tell you!"

The mystery of our Stanleyville fiasco was never satisfactorily explained.

True, when we reached our base camp and reopened the radio boxes which the porters supplied by Chief Inghiresa had carefully carried upside down every time we turned our head, and let fall hard to the ground every time we had told them to turn their loads around, we made a discovery.

From the bowels of the transmitter contained in box 46, the one we had used most in Stanleyville, something began to hiss and spit at us the moment Charlie and I started a new, more leisurely examination of our equipment. Upon closer inspection, the something turned out to be a horned chameleon, which we had to dislodge by sheer force from the en-

tanglement of tubes and transformers which he evidently had come to consider as a cozy little den of his own.

How and when this prehistoric-looking, irritable little monster got there was difficult to explain. How it could have escaped our notice at Stanleyville during our unending searches for something wrong was beyond our comprehension. As to why the presence of that one chameleon should have influenced the performance of two transmitters so that all our efforts were turned to the exclusive benefit of the Stanleyville District Commissioner—that is an enigma which other minds than ours must solve.

The fact remains, however, that with the removal of the chameleon and the discontinuance of the violent mistreatment that the transmitters had suffered en route, things immediately began to brighten up. Perhaps the experience gained during our frantic trials in Stanleyville may have contributed something. And the new antenna we rigged up, which swarms of pygmies noisily hoisted to the top of the only three trees we left standing in the whole clearing, helped too.

At any rate, our next try was a triumph. Finally the hams of the world had the shock of hearing our voice. And Charlie and I were even more startled at hearing from them that they had actually heard us.

It was simply amazing. The moment we went on the air, hundreds of men and women of all ages and nationalities were there—waiting for us. It was just a few months before the war was to explode in Europe. One would never have dreamed that a terrible conflict could be imminent in a world where radio amateurs of so many different tongues and races were all so eager to assist each other, so earnest to be of service to us,

so scrupulous in following all the international conventions and regulations which ruled the air.

Every night, Charlie and I would work our station, and instantly would be communicating at our will with New York, Paris, London, Cuba, San Francisco, Rhodesia, Chicago, Egypt, Malta, Brazil, Iowa—any place we wished. For a few hours it was easy to believe that we were not isolated in the depth of the equatorial jungle. In our radio tent it was difficult to remember that in the darkness around us lurked treacherous leopards, poisonous snakes, huge hippos and vicious elephants.

But those creatures, especially the hippos and elephants, did not forget us. For years previous to our advent they had used that clearing as their favorite eating place, and the few trees that had studded it as their chosen scratching posts. We had been compelled to take possession of that clearing because it was the only one around there big enough to contain our village of tents, huts and shelters. Despite our noisy presence, despite the sounds and smells made by our power plants, back they would come, both elephants and hippos, with a persistency that only the installation of our electric fence seemed able to discourage.

This fence was a single wire stretched around the whole camp on glass insulators perched on two-foot sticks planted in the ground. A special transformer connected with the wire stepped up the current from the 110 volts supplied by our power plant to a crackling 4500 volts. A contact with that innocent-looking wire, invisible in the darkness, meant a tremendous shock, a blinding spark and a terrific report.

It wasn't at all lethal. Involuntarily, I proved the point myself one night when I stumbled on the wire and was vio-

lently flung several feet through space, without even getting my legs burned. But it was an unpleasant experience. And the static that a spark from that wire could produce in our loud-speaker was something fearful.

It is to that fence that we, our mother station and our global audience owed what might be termed "The Golden Age of Station OQ5ZZ." For elephants, it is said, have a good memory, and hippos, leopards and buffaloes appear to have not such bad ones either. After a certain number of experiences with that wire, the jungle denizens decided to give us a wide berth.

The natural consequence was that we relaxed, grew too confident—and therefore careless. And so it was that we were brusquely reminded that we were not there just to amuse ourselves with that all-absorbing pastime.

No longer content with going on the air as chattering hams, we had grown much more ambitious. The night we had our rude awakening, we were to do a real broadcast—announcement; greetings to our hosts of friends; songs by our boys; a short speech by Charlie, playing of records we had made of pygmies singing to the accompaniment of tom-toms; it was to last a couple of hours.

Five continents, Africa included, were waiting to hear us. Everything was in order, checked, counterchecked. The atmosphere was friendly; there was no static.

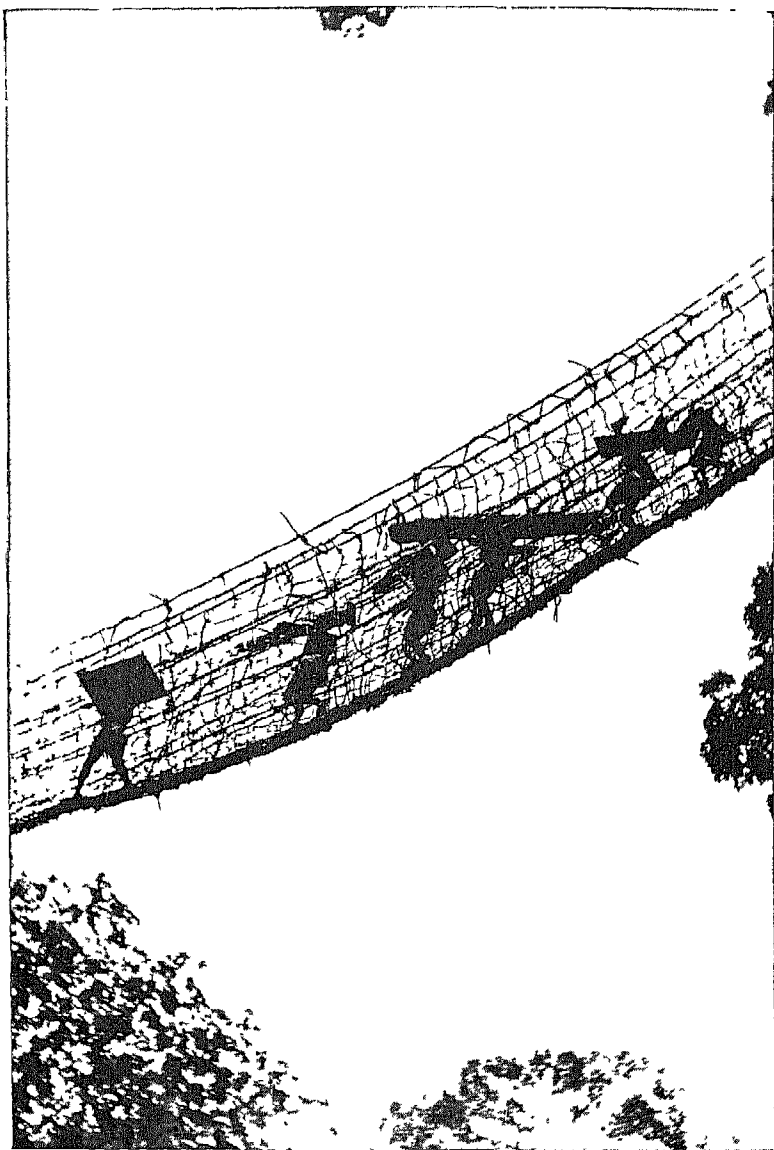
"Ready?" asked Charlie excitedly, when the time came.

"Go!" I said.

As if in answer to that word, pandemonium broke loose throughout our camp. Shouts rose from the quarters of our boys. Cries answered from the shelter of the night watchmen. The ground began to shake under our feet.



Pygmy ready to swing to the other side of the river as the first step toward making a suspension bridge



The bridge is miraculously completed and all got safely over to the other side



The chief himself almost fainted with dizziness



Watussi virgins and giant Princes in their dances

With a determined "the-show-must-go-on-at-any-cost" expression on his face, Charlie went on chanting into the mike: "Here is OQ5ZZ, calling America on schedule. Hello. Hello. Here is . . ."

My first reaction to the outside confusion was a flashing thought: the fence! Why wasn't it working? I seized my rifle and rushed to the switch. The fence was not connected—in the excitement of our broadcast, Charlie had forgotten it. I should have had more sense than to pull the switch up, now, when, evidently elephants or hippos were already inside our clearing, but I didn't have. I switched on the fence, and ran toward the direction from which a trumpeting had just risen.

In the misty opalescence of the moonlight night, I saw a heavy form approaching the tree which held the eastern leg of the antenna. I stopped and took aim. Once, twice, I fired, then a third and a fourth time, in the direction of similar forms emerging from the shadows on the left.

I don't believe I wounded any of those pygmy elephants, but the shots brought confusion among their ranks. The first thing that happened was the crackling of immense sparks from the fence. From the radio tent the reports reverberated throughout the camp, amplified a hundred times by the loud-speaker.

At the noise, I saw Charlie's silhouette jump high from the chair, as if catapulted upward by the release of a powerful spring. Boys were running around with torches. Our companions of the expedition popped out of their tents darting flashlights in every direction. Other great sparks and machine-gun cracklings came from the fence, other thunders from the radio tent, human cries and elephantine trumpetings from everywhere.

Then a low, grunting mass brushed past me. It was a hippo, blindly fleeing in terror. Another and another went heavily trotting by. Something like a slim snake twisted high in the air, whipped toward me, and almost knocked me down.

Lights went off everywhere. The power plant, suddenly freed from its load, raced madly. One of the hippos had stumbled into the heavy cable, torn it away from its locked sockets, sent it flying through space.

Taking advantage of those minutes of darkness, the last beasts rushed away. Finally they were all gone, and we all gathered together.

Everybody, white and black, was safe. But a hundred voices spoke at the same time. I shouted for silence, and got it.

The confusion was ended. And so was our ambitious program. So, also, was the broadcasting life of OQ5ZZ. For I suddenly realized that, without noticing it, we had been doing little else than devote our time and energy to this fascinating new passion. While the days were passing swiftly by, our researches on the okapi were not advancing, nor were the movies with which I was to finance at least a part of the expedition's expenses.

Something drastic had to be done. And I decided that very night that, while our whole installation was so messed up and in need of repairs, we would be better off to fold up completely our "global" activities (and the great antenna which made them possible) and put up instead the shorter, simpler antenna which, combined with the use of a special crystal, would allow us to transmit at relatively short distances.

From then on, I decreed our radio equipment would be used only to maintain a daily schedule with the Irumu post office and such communications as might be established with

large safaris that some of us should have to make deeper into the jungle.

These measures, however, did not impair in the least the efficiency of our Hallicrafters receivers. Nor did they stop us from using them, whenever we had some minutes free in the evening, to make a quick exploration of the amateur wave bands.

Only then did we begin to have an idea of the hosts of friends we had made during our brief venture in the air. Later on, this impression was confirmed by avalanches of cards from every corner of the earth, which we continued to receive with every mail until the end of the expedition. But for many a month during which we were acting, living and photographing "The Perils of the Jungle," we had only to tune in to find out that, throughout the world, faithful hams were still listening for us, dialing dials, switching switches and wondering why we had vanished so abruptly from the ether.

13.

The Okapi and "The Walking Bush"

THE GOALS I had set for our work on the okapi were several.

One was to wind up my study of the animal's life, by checking again all the data I had gathered before, and by adding every new bit I could uncover; also to learn about the relationship between the okapi and the other impressive denizens of the jungle.

Another was to corroborate as many points as possible with photographs, real photographs—something quite different from the hazy images I had obtained in the past.

And a third was to capture two specimens alive and intact, specimens not so young that they might not survive the separation from their mothers, nor so completely grown that they might be unadaptable to captivity or might kill or wound themselves badly while trying to escape. For the special permit that I had finally wrangled from the Colonial Ministry, allowing us two okapis, was limited by the most strict conditions. If an okapi died—from natural causes or because of wounds or for any other reason—while in our hands or in those of pygmies and natives working for us, or in any pit or snare we had caused to be prepared, or even during pursuit

or the attempt to photograph a specimen, that animal would be deducted from our permit, regardless of extenuating circumstances.

Furthermore, the permit was valid only for a certain period. Beyond that date, it would be of no value. If by that time we had captured only one okapi—or none at all—it would be too bad, that was all.

Difficult as each of these three aims was in itself, they were even more complicated by a fourth one, that of making a professional movie that would cover all these activities as thoroughly and truthfully as feasible, and yet contain the elements of continuity, interest, suspense and so on which are necessary to get world-wide distribution for a film.

This assignment was doubly difficult because of the enormous amount of heavy, yet delicate equipment it compelled us to carry around the whole time, and because our base camp was no longer a place near which to find okapis. The violent and explosive incidents recounted in the last chapter, added to all the noise originally made in building the camp and to that caused by the presence of so many human beings, had got on the susceptible nerves of the plentiful okapis and driven them away.

As soon as I realized how bad the situation was, I had to choose between two alternatives. One was to make long, exhausting marches every day in order to find okapi tracks, do some work and return by night—which meant wasting at least two-thirds of our time and energy. The other was to go deeper into the jungle, with the minimum of men and indispensable material, and establish a further camp, as simply and quietly as possible, from which to do our work as long as it

was profitable; then to proceed again and make another. This second alternative was the choice I made.

The plan worked splendidly. The big base camp was a good place to have so handy, for the replenishing of supplies, for the safe storage of exposed negative and for occasional periods of rest. And by radio, we were able to keep the advanced camps in daily contact with the base camp.

As a matter of fact, before long we worked out two complete and quite efficient mobile radio units. Each was composed of eleven boys and a *kapita*, or foreman, whose mission was to see that the boxes were carried upside up—or almost; and never roughly handled—or at least not too roughly. As for the boys, one carried the box containing the Hallicrafters receiver and loudspeaker; two carried, hanging from a pole, the box of the transmitter and spare parts; four took care of the generator (made more transportable by the sacrifice of the batteries for the automatic self-starter); two carried a barrel of gasoline and two the "ham shack" tent.

Though spurred on, guided, herded and protected by a dozen or so pygmy hunters, these units would take about double the time the rest of us did to reach a new camp. But, on the other hand, these men were never given another job while we were in a camp. The rest they got, plus the pride and prestige they derived from being "the men of the magic boxes of voices," made them take without much grumbling the punishing work required of them when we moved. The result was that our communications kept up beautifully, and saved us I do not know how many troubles, long marches and irritating delays. Our radio equipment also supplied the right touch for our film, and saved us once at a crucial moment, when the scenario happening to synchronize with an actual,

most tense situation, we found ourselves on the brink of disaster because of the *Maji va Nyoka*, the unknown, unsuspected "River of Crocodiles."

More of that presently. Let us not forget our quarry, the okapi, whose intimate life and habits I was learning more about with the passing of each of those many long, incredibly tiring weeks.

As time went by, I became convinced that the okapi's senses of sight, of smell, and especially of hearing, are so exquisitely sharp as to protect it from almost any surprise. Even if occasionally—by feats of patience and miracles of luck—an okapi can be caught unaware of the approach of intruders, its swift decision, aided by the exceptional strength of its bony structure and the remarkable thickness of its skin, enables it immediately to save itself by forcing a passage through entangled and matted vegetation which is absolutely impassable to white man or pygmy.

In the okapi's walk there is a kind of sluggishness, the kind you see in a slow-motion picture. In all its appearance there is, too, a deceptive air of absent-minded inoffensiveness. Despite its magnificent proportions and its height of six and a half feet for a male—or seven feet for a female—the okapi looks harmless, languid, half asleep.

The impression increases when a fly lands on the top of the animal's long head—the creature stops, produces that unending tongue, swings it a couple of times, then, with a twist of it, reaches the peak of its skull, casually to smash the fly.

But a single, barely audible rustling anywhere within a hundred yards or so is enough to prove how deceptive is this impression of languidness. Like suddenly released springs, the okapi's striped legs flash into motion. A jerky sort of leap,

and the great animal's giraffe-like, see-sawing gallop takes it with no apparent effort through the worst tangle of vegetation.

Enormous fallen trees suspended in midair, entanglements of lianas, sharp stumps, piercing thorns, steep ascents or gluey swamps—nothing stops it. What it can jump, it jumps; and the strength of its hind legs is not less than that of a good Irish hunter. The matted mass that seems impassable, it charges under. Its giraffe head, lowered, forms with the muscular neck and the strong withers a perfect arch which penetrates and slips easily under an obstacle. The short, heavy mane which reaches to the tail, and the tough skin, at points a quarter of an inch thick, protect it against the hardest scratchings. The big, wooden-looking legs which seem made only of solid bones and insensible to pain, strike against thick vines and green branches, breaking them as if they were dry, brittle sticks. The obstacle which the okapi can neither pass over nor under, it breaks down or plunges through without hesitation.

The horns, present only in the male, are very short and covered with skin except at the point. They do not even grow solidly out of the skull, but simply rest on it, often without any cohesion, held in place only by the hide, with which they come out when a dead okapi is skinned. What counts, what brings fearful results, is the great bony plate which protects the forehead. More than half an inch thick, it begins at the first vertebra and extends down to just above the eyes. Under the impulse of a mass higher and heavier than that of a horse, and of a determination ten times as strong, that bony plate becomes a formidable battering ram.

What that battering ram cannot conquer is quickly over-

come by what might be called the okapi's heavy artillery. It turns and gives one kick. It seldom needs to give two, for few obstacles can resist that cannon shot. And through the breach it has made, small as that may be, it forces its way, the head almost touching the knees, forming a penetrating shape like that of a torpedo.

It squeezes through, again butts with its head, again lets go a shattering kick, and off it goes, with a seesawing, giraffe-like canter that seems so precarious, yet is so sharp and sure, the feet never stumbling, never slipping even in the thick, slimy mud of the jungle.

In consequence of this, the okapi has nothing to fear from the other denizens of the jungle. According to the pygmies, it can easily vanquish the truculent, vicious forest buffalo, or jungle cow, the only animal which on rare occasions dares to take a stand before an adult okapi.

As for the other large inhabitants of the okapi's kingdom, both the normal elephant and the pygmy elephant maintain with it, as elsewhere with the giant gorilla, a disinterested neutrality. The leopard often spends hours in ambush in the vague hope of surprising a young okapi alone, but it never would dare to challenge an adult. As for the Congo bongo, it usually prefers to keep to other parts of the jungle, fully respecting the okapi's privacy.

Being an animal of great fastidiousness and meticulous cleanliness, the okapi, just before sunrise, goes to bathe at one of the thousand streams of the forest, always carefully choosing a spot where the water is clear, the bottom sandy and clean, and where some sun will soon penetrate to dry its luxurious coat. Clearings of this kind being comparatively few, okapis sometimes meet. But immediately after their ablu-

tions are finished and they have licked themselves dry, each one goes its own way. For the okapi is a confirmed solitary, and lives always alone, except for the short time of the mating season and for the few months when a mother nurses her young.

This peculiar individualism gives the okapi great liberty of movement and makes it possible for one to slip away unobserved when a group of even three or four would not be able to.

I was to discover later, and to my sorrow, a vitally important reason which compels the okapi to follow both its fierce isolationism and its ceaseless roaming. That is the need which the animal instinctively feels of avoiding fresh excrements of other okapis, as well as its own. For in them thrives a parasite of infinitesimal proportions, which can shortly kill the okapi to which it attaches itself, even if it is the healthiest, strongest specimen of its kind.

This bit of Nature's perversity was revealed by the post-mortem made by a capable veterinarian on a splendid okapi I finally captured, which died for no apparent reason when he was perfectly accustomed to his palisade and reconciled to the loss of his freedom. This strange fact might also go a long way toward explaining the otherwise inexplicable death of practically every okapi taken into captivity and therefore confined to a relatively small space.

At any rate, an okapi seldom remains long in the same vicinity. Where it finds itself toward evening, there it makes its bed, an entire walking day, or at least several hours, from the sleeping place of yesterday and tomorrow.

Not even the necessities of its stomach tie it to one place

more than to another. The jungle, "the Great Mother," as the pygmies call it, is abundantly rich in everything. The tender leaves, the succulent stems, the tasty roots which the okapi prefers grow in profusion everywhere. Among them are the *matungulu*, the tall reeds which push up straight to a height of twelve or fifteen feet, as if in an effort to obtain air and light, with their crisp leaves and the delicate white flowers, similar to an orchid, at their base. Then there is the *moodi*, of which the okapi eats the big red flowers, and the young leaves rolled into a thin funnel, with their mother-of-pearl stems, as tender and full of flavor as young celery. The okapi's diet includes various other small shrubs, all with perfumed, somewhat bitter leaves so delicious that more than once we have eaten them ourselves as a salad.

As for what I believe to be the okapi's natural "medicines"—charcoal and a kind of salty soil—it can, of course, find them everywhere; charcoal from trees burned by lightning, and *bulungo*, as the pygmies call a certain reddish, slightly saliferous clay, from the banks of rivers where it is common.

With a temperament so cold and courageous and stubborn, with such freedom of action and such weapons at its disposal, it is easy to understand how the okapi is no less feared than desired by the pygmies, whom, in case of necessity, it does not hesitate to charge, with complete disregard for their spears and arrows. And its determination, its boldness, are as unbounded as the fluid agility of its movements.

A hundred times, while following a track, I marveled that so large an animal could have passed so quickly and silently a short time before us, while we, bent double and often crawling, were obliged to advance so noisily and laboriously, cut-

ting down lianas with machetes, being slapped by thorny branches, lassoed by steely creepers, making continuous detours to avoid impassable entanglements.

When, with the help of Kotu-Kotu's pygmies, I finally succeeded in cornering a female into an ambush from which I felt sure that she could not possibly escape, I was astonished by such a spectacle of masterly strength and wily cunning as to give me a full realization of the difficulties of the task I had so light-heartedly undertaken.

Had I planned that corner of the jungle myself, instead of being led to it by the pygmies' extraordinary ability, seconded by a streak of luck, it could not have been better.

On two sides it was enclosed by an unbroken perpendicular surface of granite, so smoothed by the elements that not a cat could climb it. The opening through which we had the good fortune to drive that female was barred by three of us and by half a dozen of the bravest and most devoted among our pygmy hunters. The remaining side was blockaded by a group of mahogany trees whose contorted branches and strong trunks were closely bound together by lianas as big as a man's thigh. There, every interstice was so packed with thorn bushes and with matted undergrowth that I instantly judged that no living creature could break through. In fact, the huge female, her back against the rocks, faced us in absolute immobility, as if realizing that she had no hope of escape.

I was exulting, and busy with my camera, when through the sight I saw her move. A few jerky strides of her *rallentando* motion brought her almost upon me. Some of the pygmies yelled and jumped to one side. Others yelled and aimed their poisoned arrows.

"*Hapana!*" I had just the time to shout. "*No!*"

And the animal, ending her successful feint, swerved to the right, straight toward the mahoganies. I was so certain she would stop there that I hesitated an instant. Instead, she went on as steadily and relentlessly as a mighty tank.

Before I could click the shutter again, the okapi's forelegs had broken the first branches and lianas, more efficiently than an axe could do. Her feet seemed to glide over the ground, above enormous low stumps and a fallen trunk. Her lowered head lifted the largest liana as if it were a twig. She slipped under it as easily as if removing the fragile tendril of a vine—and she was gone.

The whole encounter had lasted perhaps a minute, not more than two. There had been no time to bring the portable cameras into action. And the light was far from ideal. But my expensive new photographic equipment had had its first chance to prove its worth.

That same night, back in our temporary camp, I held my breath and developed the negatives. The pictures I had shot while the okapi had made her feinting charge were, as I expected, hopelessly out of focus. And the two I had frantically taken while she catapulted through the vegetation were too weak. But several of those I had snapped during those seconds of the okapi's calculating immobility were good. Not perfect, mind you, because neither I nor anyone else has ever managed, and probably never will, to take a perfect snapshot in that accursed excess of green tones and green filtered dimness. But they were good—and they were *the first photographs ever obtained of an okapi alive and free*, and of a superb specimen, at that.

That first achievement, more than filling me with elation, fired me with the desire for better, more abundant results. If

it had happened once, I reasoned, it was my business to make it happen again and again, and every time under better circumstances. But never, in the months that followed, was fate to give me another break of this kind.

I tried, of course. We all tried, over and over again, and the pygmies, from the amount of salt and tobacco and congratulations they received, finally grasped this crazy idea of the white man who wanted to corner an okapi, not to kill and eat it and make belts from its skin, but only to look at it, and that not even through his own eyes, but through the glassy ones of the "magic little boxes of phutulas."

So the pygmies did all they could to humor me, and to obtain again so many extra handfuls of salt and tobacco. But the gods of camera-hunting refused to smile again upon our efforts.

In the end, I had to think up some new ideas. One day I thought I had got hold of the right one.

"If I cannot get an okapi into an open space," I reasoned, "I will have to approach one that is already in a clearing. Only, how can I approach it undetected? And how can I remain undetected long enough to take pictures while it is in a decent light?"

It was then when I had a flash of genius. "I'll transform myself into a walking bush," I decided. "That will do it!"

The next time a pygmy scout emerged from nowhere to report in sign language that an okapi was standing in a clearing large enough to receive some direct sunlight, I put the plan into action. I motioned to the other pygmies to help me, and they, cutting in their silent fashion bunches of leafy branches, began to tie them all around me.

I must have been a strange sight. However, the pygmies

were much too polite and much too clever to let their astonished merriment out in laughter. They did not even giggle.

All that Kotu-Kotu dared to whisper timidly in my ear, while fastening the last branches, was the word *bilulu*.

Now, that is the name of the biting ants which, if they can get at you, cover your body without your noticing anything, and then, at some kind of signal from their commander-in-chief, instantly sting you—everywhere, all at one time, with the most devastating effect.

"The damned fool," I said to myself, my eyes riveted on the curtain of vegetation behind which was the okapi. "What does he think—that I will stumble blindly into a caravan of *bilulu* without noticing them?"

And my camouflage being completed, my camera all set, off I went, silent as a shadow, gliding through the jungle without so much as a rustle.

As soon as I detected the form of the okapi, slowly, carefully, I went down on all fours.

Each time the animal stopped feeding, or turned its head toward me, I froze in my tracks. And there I remained, immobile as a tree, until all signs of alarm disappeared.

The pygmies having picked up the wind and set me straight against it, I succeeded in reaching a spot about twenty-five feet from the animal. Just the distance I had aimed to reach and had set on the lens.

The okapi was in a good light, for once. And it paid no attention to me, as yet. Between it and me there was not a single liana or branch to obstruct the field. All I had to do was to straighten up, raise the camera, aim it, shoot.

To make it perfect, just then the okapi casually turned its head, not toward me, but in the opposite direction. I did not

need to move with cautious slowness; instead, I straightened up with one quick jerk, and clicked the shutter.

In that same instant, something clicked in my mind—what Kotu-Kotu had meant. The *bilulu* against which he had warned me were not on the ground—they were in the branches I had asked him to fasten around me quickly and with no back talk. Now, having had all the time to creep all over me and to ambush themselves under my clothes, they had taken my brusque movement as a declaration of war. Without losing a second, they all attacked at once, plunging into my skin thousands of pairs of sharp pincers, it seemed.

It is not hard to imagine what happened then. One okapi picture had been taken. But during that fraction of a second, things suddenly flew in every direction—my camera in one, the startled okapi in another, and I in still another, yelling and leaping and darting to throw myself—bush and all—into the nearest stream.

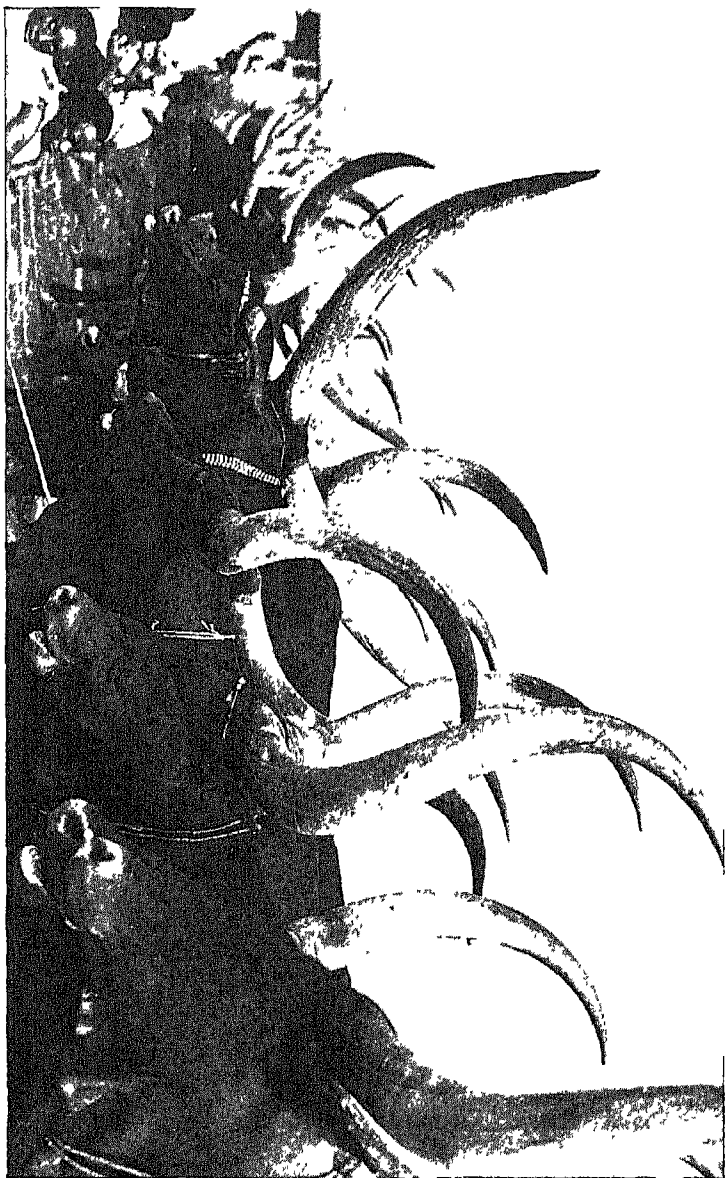
Which is the only quick way to deal with the *bilulu*—and the way to drown once and for all any desire to be a “walking bush.”



*A giant Watussi Prince goes hunting with his retinue of
Batwa hunters*



The Prince displays the leopard he has killed



The sacred and royal cows of the Watussi

we could advance with it as fast as all the pygmies, pygmoids and boys we could muster could cut a sufficiently wide path.

The okapi, however, was another kind of customer. And, above all, none of us could compare with the Uele hunters. At the mahogany grove, the boys with the ropes had not even dared to show up. The pygmies, though practically fearless, had only one idea and knew how to do only one thing well—to kill. As for ourselves, what could we do? Even if I had felt like attempting it myself—which now I didn't—how could I have asked my companions to help me try to shackle such a powerful animal?

Other systems which the pygmies were only too glad to suggest were even more hopeless for our purpose—and repulsive, too. One, proposed by Kotu-Kotu himself, consisted in taking advantage of our quarry's extraordinary mania for cleanliness. The okapi, he said, urinated very seldom, but when it did, it was for a long period. During this time, it would not move for anything, for fear of soiling the immaculate white of its legs. It was, apparently, the habit of the pygmies, those miracles of patience, to try to surprise an okapi at such a time and let loose upon it with their arrows and spears.

Another plan, equally cruel, was to attempt to find a mother in the act of nursing her little one, kill her and throw ropes over the defenseless young.

Other hunters suggested pursuing a mother with a pack of the little voiceless dogs which the pygmies treasure, until the baby okapi, exhausted, would fall behind and be easily pounced upon. Or to hide loops of wire in the vegetation in the hope that an okapi would stick its neck into one, and by its frantic efforts to free itself, pull on the loop and draw it tighter and tighter until strangled.

During my years in the Kibali-Ituri jungle I was to learn that the pygmies had used one or the other of these hunting methods with full success. But, besides being stupidly savage, to our way of thinking, each of those methods would have defeated our chief aim—to capture a specimen in perfect condition. And we had also to keep in mind that, regardless of circumstances, the death, or even the probable death of an okapi, would automatically mean a deduction from our permit. The one thing that remained to us was to resort to the *zemu*, or hunting pits.

These are holes about twelve feet deep, five feet wide and ten feet long, which must be dug along a path usually frequented by okapis. The walls must be perpendicular, the bottoms lined with a thick mattress of leaves to avoid the risk of a falling animal breaking its legs. All the huge quantity of soil excavated must be dispersed at a distance, so as not to arouse suspicion. And the opening must be covered with a trellis of light, straight sticks, then with wide leaves, then with dead leaves, bits of dry wood, little clumps of soil, small ant-heaps and so on—until not even your own eyes can distinguish the *zemu* you have made from the surrounding ground.

This may sound simple. But, once I had decided on the *zemu*, I saw that to have the faintest chance of success, we would need to build scores of such pits. And that was only the beginning. The most tiresome and time-absorbing task was to keep all the pits in constant repair. For anything—a strong rain, the clumsy foot of an elephant or a buffalo, or even one of us falling into our own traps—was enough to spoil the masking and to give away the whole works.

Each pit had to be inspected every morning. Otherwise, had an okapi fallen into one at night and died of injuries,

starvation or a broken heart, we would be held responsible, and our permit be cut accordingly.

Those were the hardest months of all. Black leopards, other leopards and smaller cats would fall into a *zemu*, demolish the camouflage and get away. Other animals of every kind—gazelles, antelopes, wart hogs, giant pigs, buffaloes, anteaters, porcupines, tortoises—would stay caught. Our pygmies and boys, perennially hungry for meat, would welcome them. But not we—for each of them meant a *zemu* to be fixed up again from A to Z.

As for okapis, almost every day we found new tracks around the edges of several holes. But they were too smart—they refused to be fooled.

And all I had left was four weeks!

By our radio, we sent a telegram via the Irumu post office, asking for an extension of the permit. Soon the answer came: "Sorry. Impossible."

And against our staying was the fact that we all had lost a lot of weight, and jungle fever was recurring with longer attacks, at shorter intervals. Nerves were on edge. Permit or no permit, I felt that we couldn't last much longer, anyway, than the four remaining weeks.

We were now at about six long days' march from the road, and in what I thought was a practically straight westward direction from it. Perhaps, if we could go another couple of days westward, make new pits where okapis had not been made alert by any previous presence of human beings, we might have better luck. I tried to convince Kotu-Kotu, but both he and the elders of the tribe refused even to consider going another hour toward the west. We had reached the

limits of a taboo zone, and apparently one barred by the most terrible curses.

In despair, I thought of another plan.

The north-south road was crossed at Irumu by the east-west road, the same one which we had followed in coming from Stanleyville. On that road, about 200 miles west of Irumu, between the little government post of Mambasa and the pontoon on the Epulu River, was a chief I knew well. In the beginning, I had debated whether to go and establish our base camp near him, instead of Inghiresa, since in that part of the jungle there were just as many okapis and possibly more. Furthermore this chief, Abdullah by name, was not a transplanted Wandande. He was an Arabise, that is, a descendant of the Arab slave traders of earlier days. He had been born in the jungle, was the son of a jungle man, and a great hunter himself.

Abdullah had no pygmoids in his territory. He went constantly into the jungle himself and dealt directly with the true pygmies. And his men, being of another blood and living near a great river, were healthy with much fish-eating, strong with plenty of hard paddling against the river's turbulent currents and not afraid of the jungle, often going into it to hunt with their chief and his pygmies. They would be sure to have a lot of old *zemu*, even if in bad state of repair. To fix them up would be something different from building them from scratch. And Abdullah could certainly produce a lot of men, in an emergency.

If Charlie left at once, taking one of my best boys as interpreter and picking up needed material, including the radio unit, at the base camp, in about seven days he could reach the road, and with one of the trucks could race to the village

of Chief Abdullah in another two. In four or five more, he could start supervising the repairing of *zemu* far enough south of the Stanleyville road to have a good chance of success.

If everything went well, in two weeks we might be in radio communication. That would still leave two weeks before the end of the permit, during which we would be working in two localities instead of one, and regularly in touch every morning and evening.

As soon as Charlie was off, something else occurred to me. After all, it was evident that the okapi was fond of the saltiness of the *bulungo*. Why not spread salt along the paths which lead to each *zemu*? Especially to those where we had concealed automatic movie and still cameras?

I mentioned the matter to Kotu-Kotu, and he almost fainted. Throw away good, precious salt so that all the animals could lick it at their will? When he himself, a great sultani and an old friend of mine, had barely enough for his wives and children? The little man was outraged.

But I explained to him that what we needed to capture—and in a hurry—was an okapi, not a sultani. This he thought was a great joke, but it did not make my plan seem any less crazy to him.

However, beginning the following morning, I spread handfuls of salt every day on each strategic path, during the inspection of the pits. After three days, we began to see results.

Greedy for the taste of salt, okapis were coming in greater and greater numbers to the paths I had chosen. At night, they left more and more tracks all around the rigged-up pits. Oftener and oftener the fore foot of an okapi would even slip into a *zemu*. But, invariably, the animal retreated in time,

without even touching off a camera or a flare, since the strings controlling them were stretched across the pit so as to catch the actual fall of an animal. So my only reward was to find more and more footprints—and more and more maskings to be made over.

Now there were only two weeks to go—and not a word from Charlie. For two days I delayed starting on my morning inspection long enough to call him for an hour, at the time we had arranged—an hour of calling and listening, calling and listening—and worrying. Perhaps Charlie was sick; perhaps Abdullah was absent, or unwilling; perhaps an accident had happened on the road or—even worse—in the jungle.

The third morning it was the same story. For a whole hour I went on calling and listening and worrying. I forced myself to be patient. "I'll try once more," I said to myself, but I was sure nothing would come of it.

Then, so abruptly that it left me stunned, out of the Hallcrafters Charlie's voice boomed clearly. And he was nonchalantly talking in the ham's jargon: "Q R K. Q R V, O M," which is, "What is the readability of my signal? Are you ready, old man?"

My own signal, according with his, was "R-3, but S-8 T-5," meaning, "Readable with considerable difficulty. But strong tone with slight trace of whistle."

Whistle, my hat! There I was, worrying about where he was, what he was doing, what chances there were of his getting some *zemu* ready in time—and he was showing off with his coded remarks!

Finally we got down to business. Yes, he was all right, except for some fever and some digestion trouble. Everything had gone according with plans. He hadn't the slightest

idea where he was. He had marched four long days, keeping up with that demon of an Abdullah, who had with him a whole bunch of ribald, impudent natives. Good guys on the whole—though not in the least interested in digging up old pits. They had helped the boy put up the little camp. Now they were sitting around the fire, near the tent, not showing the faintest disposition for work.

Suddenly Charlie's voice changed. "Stand by," he said to me in a hurry. "Stand by, please."

After a few minutes he came back. "It was Abdullah," he said. "I had to have the boy talk fast to him, he was so scared. He recognized your voice, and began to look all over the place to see if you were hidden somewhere. Then, when he couldn't find you, he let out a yell to his men—that was what interrupted me. They were all standing, spears in hands, as if ready to run. Can you think of anything special I should try to tell the chief? He seems still pretty much agitated. Come in!"

I switched the receiver off, the transmitter on, and told Charlie to be sure that the chief was still within hearing distance. Then: "Abdullah!" I called. And I went to tell him in Kingwana that this was a great magic of the white men, one which brought much good luck to anyone who could hear it. And that I thanked him and his men, and wanted them all to do everything that Charlie asked, and to get an okapi soon, but *imbio kabissa*—the sooner the better—and the bigger the presents I would give to him, his men, his pygmies. I asked him to tell the white man exactly where they were, and I closed by expressing the most punctilious salutations and wishes, according with the best native etiquette.

When Charlie came back on the air, his voice was positively

awed. The Chief and all his men, he said, had heard and understood every word, and the effect upon them was impossible to describe. Even the most arrogant of Abdullah's men were now looking subdued. The interpreter had just assured Charlie that the men would go to work at once, for "who could stand up against such a magic?"

As for the place, Abdullah had said it was "the Three Springs where Apwa-Libwa died of elephant wounds."

I jotted down this non-geographical name on the log book, reminded Charlie of our appointment in the evening and got back his O.K., plus a professional "73's, O B," which is ham dialect for "best regards, old boy."

When I looked at my watch I saw that I was almost three hours late for my inspection.

"Let's hope that no okapi is in a pit *this* morning," I thought. And off I went with the pygmies who had been patiently waiting near my tent with the blasé air of persons long since accustomed to watching their Bwana talk into a little round can, and hearing other, distant Bwanas answer back with voices louder than their own, out of a square box so small that it couldn't contain even a pygmy's baby.

All the way to the first hole, I prayed that no okapi was trapped there, this morning when I was so late. I had enough sense of humor to realize how contradictory it was for me to feel that way, when I had been doing everything for almost a year to get an okapi—and now I had only eleven days left. But what might happen to an animal of such fierce independence and determination, of such hypersensitiveness, if it were imprisoned a whole night, and a whole long morning in one of those narrow pits?

It was not until we were about to reach the last *zemu* but

one, that the pygmies noticed something wrong. They made a gesture to stop me and slipped silently ahead. A few minutes, and they were back.

Their faces wore a wide grin of triumph. "Okapi," said one of them. "An okapi is in the *zemu*, Bwana!"

For a moment I refused to believe it.

But the pygmies were giggling, and nodding happily.

"Come on," I said. "Let's go!"

A pygmy leaped ahead to show me the way.

"Is it a male?" I asked.

"No, Bwana," he answered. "A female."

"Young?"

"No, Bwana. It is a big, big one."

"How is she?"

"Look, Bwana. There!"

I expected to see an okapi thrusting out its head to watch our approach, butting against the wall of the pit, while its legs kicked in a desperate effort to get away. Instead, not a sound, not a movement.

"Where?" I asked impatiently.

"There," pointed the pygmy, laughing with joy. "You see, Bwana? A leopard killed it last night, while it couldn't defend itself."

He bent down on the edge of the pit, better to examine the ghastly bloody mess it contained—and his grin vanished. "The evil leopard," he hissed with fury. "All the good meat of the back he has taken away!"

I could not say a word—I was feeling too sick to speak.

15.

The "Maji ya Nyoka"

AS ALWAYS, there was a silver lining. The rig had worked. The flashes had worked. The cameras, both the still and the movie portable, had worked. Later, we were to find that out of the deplorable accident we had gained a few negatives and several score feet of film showing what no human eye had ever seen before: almost every motion of an okapi falling into a trap. But—that beautiful animal butchered like that! One okapi gone, and ten days left to get the other!

The disposal of the dead animal presented no difficulty. The pygmies cut the carcass to pieces, erased every trace of the disaster, fixed up the *zemu* at top speed, gaily lifted chunks of meat bigger than themselves, and we were on our way back to camp. The last *zemu*, fortunately, didn't need any repair.

I arrived just in time to keep my schedule with Charlie. I gave him the bad news. He told me that Abdullah's men, after my morning pep talk, had put in such an amount of work that he was hoping they would be through by the end of the following day and could be sent back to their village. I told him to use as much salt as necessary on every path leading to every repaired *zemu*, and signed off.

That was the one time, by the way, when I tasted a piece of roasted okapi meat. It was tender, delicate and full of aro-

matic flavor, probably derived from the strongly perfumed flowers and leaves that the okapi eats.

It must have been good to impress me that way on that night. The disappointment, added to the general exhaustion that comes to every man from a too prolonged stay in the jungle, gave me a bad attack of fever. I took twenty grains of quinine and went to bed.

How many days passed after that, I know only by the calendar, my diary and the log book.

For seven days, I went through a continuous nightmare, feverish, dispirited, drained, aching in every bone, yet keeping up the routine of talking to Charlie, dragging myself from *zemu* to *zemu*, swallowing quinine and falling into a disturbed sleep filled with agonizing dreams.

The eighth morning, I snapped out of it the moment Charlie's voice came through.

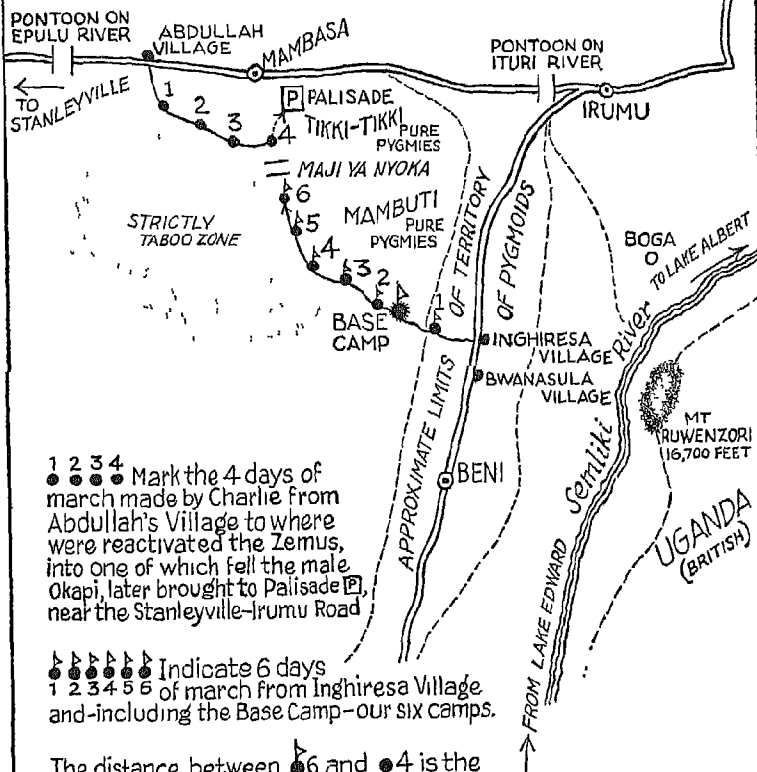
During the night, he said, a male okapi had fallen in one of Abdullah's pits. A pygmy had just arrived with the report. And, this time, the animal was intact. So intact and full of hell, as a matter of fact, that the pygmies didn't dare go within reach of the animal's head.

I forgot all about fever, fatigue and gloom. The news seemed to electrify me. The problems it posed absorbed me so much that I even forgot to ask Charlie how he was. In "The Perils of the Jungle" we had him hurt a leg badly. The prosaic truth, not so adapted to the screen, was that he had been suffering from a severe spell of dysentery for which, later, he had to spend two weeks in the little hospital of Irumu.

I found out how serious it was only when I told him to build a palisade around the *zemu*, to try by himself to let the

JUNGLE MAP

South of the
Stanleyville-Irumbu Road
(Okapi researches and capture)



The distance between 6 and 4 is the unexpectedly short one we had to cover to go to the rescue of Charlie and of the captured male Okapi. It also shows the approximate position of the "River of Crocodiles" (probably a tributary of the great Epulu River). On both sides of the Stanleyville-to-Irumbu and of the North-to-South roads there is nothing but thick jungle, mostly unexplored.

okapi out, if the pygmies didn't want to help, and to keep the animal safely there until we could arrive. Then, he had to tell me the truth. He was as badly off as I had been—and worse. As for waiting perhaps fourteen days and handling everything by himself that long, he was afraid that it couldn't be done.

So, there we were, with an okapi in our hands, but at four days' march from the nearest village, and two weeks by break-neck marching and driving from where we were. The slightest delay, and the animal would die. Then, not only our permit would be ended, but it would be considered used, too—in full.

I asked Charlie how far it was from his tent to the pit. He said that it would take him only twenty minutes or so, and that he felt he could do whatever I thought should be done to protect the okapi. I told him to take the boy and all the pygmies, build a roof over the *zemu* and put around it branches of *matungulu* and *moodi*; to see that as little noise as possible was made; to leave pygmies to guard the okapi, and come back and call me again. Meanwhile, I said, I would figure out something.

Kotu-Kotu was the only one who could help me. I explained the situation to him and asked for his advice. West he had said we couldn't go. But couldn't he find a way of guiding us through the jungle to where the other Bwana was?

"There?" I said, pointing toward the northwest.

"There," he calmly said, pointing straight north.

I tried to convince him, but he could not be shaken. The Bwana Mandefu, the "White man with a Beard," was there, he insisted.

Of course there is no map of the jungle. All I had to help

me was a sketch¹ I tried to keep up to date every time we moved forward. With no instruments except a compass, without a measure of distance except the number of hours we marched, the sketch was of only relative assistance.

"Do you know how far Bwana Mandefu is?" I asked him.

He shook his head. He knew the direction, but not the distance. Only then did I remember the name Charlie had given me the first day, and I went to look it up in the log book.

"The Three Springs where Apwa-Libwa died of elephant wounds," I read aloud—that would be a great help.

But it was. The moment I let out that name, the air got thick with "wah-wah's" of startled surprise. The pygmies began talking all together, so fast that I could not understand half of it. It was clear, however, that they all knew that place. Also, that some of them thought we could reach it, while others were very much against the idea.

That was enough for me. I called my companions and told them to get ready to move as quickly as possible. I gave orders to the cook and the boys, and I went back to the radio tent. As soon as I got Charlie's signal, I told him to hold on as best he could until we got there, not by the long detour of the road, but through the jungle, as fast as we could—four or five days, I guessed.

When I went back to the pygmies, their discussion stopped and Kotu-Kotu's face told me that he was ready to give me the tribe's answer. They were willing to guide us—but only to the *Maji ya Nyoka*, the "River of Crocodiles." There, Kotu-Kotu's territory ended. Beyond that river, he had never gone since he was a young man and got his first wife from the Tikky-Tikky, the pygmies to whom the jungle on the

¹ See Sketch of Jungle.

other side of the river belonged. Once at the river, Zutu, the tribe's witchdoctor, would find out what Munngu, the greatest of gods, said should be done.

"Once there," I said to myself, "Zutu is going to get so damn much salt and tobacco and whatever else he wants, that he is going to find out that we go ahead."

"All right," I said aloud. "But let's go at once. And leave behind only enough men to destroy every *zemu* we have made. All the others who come—men, women and children—will have a bellyful of salt and their pipes smoking for as long as they want."

I knew, of course, that the pygmies would not be such fools as to undo the masking of all the pits it had cost so much labor to build up and to keep in good condition. But I insisted, and some old people were left for that work. I paid them royally for it, in front of everybody, so as to be in order with the authorities. At the same time I promised myself that I wouldn't recognize any of the same pygmies if before night some of them joined up with the rest of the safari. Which is what they all did, without exception.

In less than two hours we were moving off. Mangara, youngest son of the sultani, was leading, following in the steps of Kotu-Kotu, who had already gone ahead with a handful of hunters. Behind me and the two cameramen, came the radio unit, the caravan of the loaded boys and the long procession of the overloaded pygmy women, with the usual protective rearguard of hunters.

We went at unusual speed. Before the afternoon was half over, I was agreeably surprised to see a diffused light ahead of us and to hear Mangara say: "*Maji ya Nyoka, iko!*"

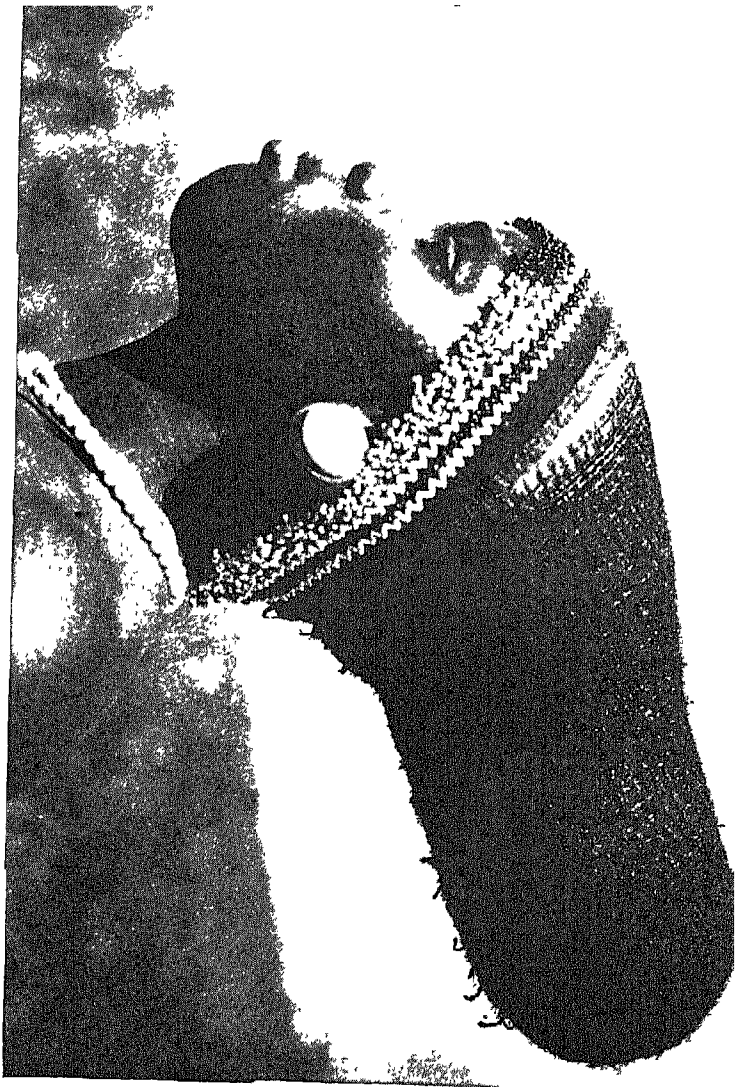
As rivers go in tropical Africa, this wasn't much of a



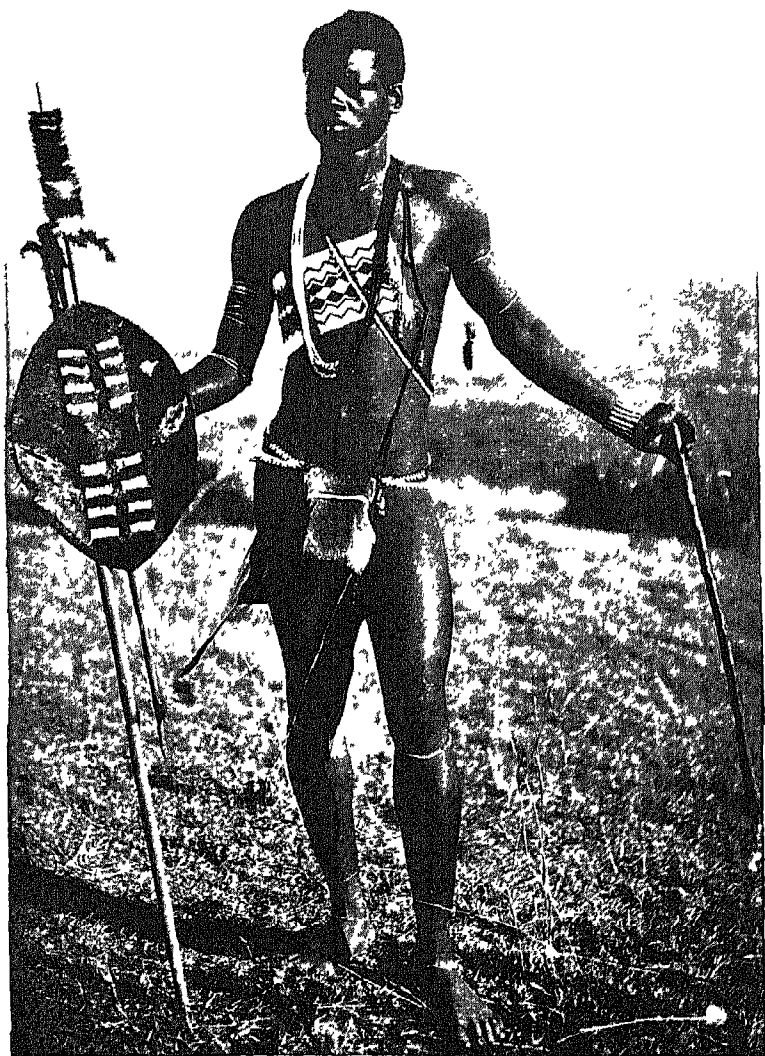
High-jumping, a sport in which the Watussi have broken all the world's records



A Zulu who is expert in handling pythons



A Zulu beauty and superb type of young womanhood



Manly Zulu warrior

stream. As the head of our safari began to emerge from the steamy semi-darkness of the jungle into the blinding sunlight along the river's bank, I saw a dark brown expanse of water not three hundred feet wide. How deep it was, I could not judge. The water was so thick with mud that the center of the river's bed could be five feet below as well as fifty.

The innocuous appearance of the scene would have fooled me completely had it not been for the lightning succession of noisy splashes which had marked our arrival, and the clusters of air bubbles which still marred the otherwise peaceful surface of the water.

Kotu-Kotu and his men were waiting where the path ended. Together we advanced toward the shore.

"Nyoka," he said. "Tens and tens and tens of them." And his forefinger fearfully pointed here and there.

"Come on!" I said to him. "Some crocodiles—yes. But haven't I and the other Bwana our rifles? You and your hunters and my boys go and make good, big rafts, quick. And I—poom—poom—kill all the *nyoka* . . ."

"Kill that one, Bwana," interrupted the sultani. "Then, if you still want it, I shall ask Zutu."

It is always well to humor those little rascals of pygmies. So I aimed at something which looked like a log floating slowly with the current, and let go.

The "log" jerked up. It reared higher and higher in the air, up to twenty or twenty-five feet. Then it tipped back, and, with a great splash, fell into the water.

Bob, the assistant cameraman, gasped. "Hell! The greatest croc on earth—and I wasn't ready!"

"I guess I can get you another," I said. "Tell me as soon as . . ."

I never finished that sentence. I had seen plenty of crocs before, but what happened then left me speechless.

It was as if a volcano had suddenly erupted under the river's surface. The water broke into an amazing turmoil. As far as we could see, it was violently stirred, jolted, slashed—not by tens, but by hundreds of crocs.

They all rushed toward the monster I had shot, seizing it, tearing it asunder. Such a confusion of snapping jaws, whipping tails, and nauseating noises I had never heard. The brown water took on a red tinge.

In a few seconds the tumult subsided, and except for a scattering of ripples, all was quiet again.

I looked back, hoping that the frightening spectacle had been spared my not too heroic boys. But, most of them were already there—their eyes staring, their mouths gaping, their loads, which they always dropped the moment they could, still on their heads, forgotten for once, as if the awe inspired by the scene had made them unaware of the weight they carried.

The sultani picked that moment to clinch his argument.

"A raft," he said softly, "might be made big and strong. But the *nyoka* are bigger and stronger. And many." And his little hands went into a drama of movement. They imitated a croc's tail slashing a raft, the raft overturned, its contents spilled into the teeming waters, the onrushing of voracious monsters. He joined his two elbows and alternately parted and joined his forearms in expressive mimicry of steely jaws snapping wide open and shut.

"Wouldn't be a nice way of signing off, would it?" said Bob.

We held a counsel of war. The pygmies liked Bwana Mandefu, and once I had explained to them how sick he was, how imperative it was that we reach him, Zutu looked at the sultani and lightly nodded. It was as easy as that.

But the raft proposition was out. And a detour seemed to be out of the question, for the sultani insisted that the river went on for days and days of march, both to the east and the west.

"Well, then," I asked, "what do you want us to do—let Bwana Mandefu die?"

"No," he said, "the waters which no man can cross, the pygmies can walk above."

"How?" I asked. "Through the air?"

"Yes, Bwana," the little man answered with utmost seriousness. "From the top of this tree"—he pointed—"to the top of that tree on the other shore. And all the safari shall be safe. The men, the women, the children, the boxes."

Of course I had heard that pygmies sometimes made aerial bridges of lianas. But I had never seen one myself. And how could they overcome a 300-foot gap?

It sounded impossible, yet it was our only way. Doubtful as I still was, I decided to take a chance. And strangely enough, the moment I announced the plan to the boys, they showed the greatest relief and jumped to work with unusual alacrity.

Before evening came, a wide space was cleared, some way back from the river's bank, and our camp pitched.

The next morning a bustling activity began with the dawn. By that night, rolls of long lianas, as thick as a man's wrist,

were piled high wherever there was a free space—except in front of my tent and the short-distance antenna I had rigged up above it.

That night, I tried for two hours to call Charlie. When I finally got him, he was breathless and excited.

The thought of our coming had revived him, though he was still weak. The pygmies had seemed to know of our coming even before he told them, and had gone to work with enthusiasm. They had finished a solid palisade around the lucky *zemu*, had even overcome their aversion to approaching the okapi, and had helped in every way. And now the okapi was out of the *zemu*, without a scratch, too exhausted to attempt escape, but well enough, even after those two miserable days in the pit, to nibble at the fresh branches of *matungulu* and *moodi* which the pygmies kept bringing to the palisade and dropping through the poles.

So—"hurry," Charlie was saying, "hurry, hurry—before something happens!"

What worried him most was that the okapi might recover enough to charge against the palisade and break through it. And how were we to carry such an animal through the jungle that it had taken him four days to cross?

"Listen," I said with sudden inspiration. "I've just thought how we can manage that. We will let the okapi carry himself.

"Have the pygmies build a cage without a bottom, as strong as possible but not too heavy, and with a door on the back. Have them tie two long poles to the outside. Then we can have our boys carry the cage. Pad it well inside with whatever material you can. Cut a tent to pieces, if necessary. But make it smooth enough that the animal will not get hurt if he tries to charge ahead, or balk, or swerve to one side. The weight

of the cage and of the men transporting it will serve as brake enough, even for an okapi.

"And make the cage narrow, so it will give less freedom of action to the okapi and be easier to maneuver between the trees. Get the cage ready, for in two days we will be there.

"And have the pygmies make a tipoye for you, while you are at it. The okapi will march on his own feet, but you'll sit, all the way to the road."

We repeated all this again, and went over every detail. If Charlie could keep his strength up for another two days, if the okapi didn't get too strong, if Kotu-Kotu's pygmies kept their promise to get the bridge ready, we would all be set—with a grand movie mostly done, and with an okapi safely on its way to captivity.

The Jungle's Brooklyn Bridge

THE THIRD day, the unbelievable began to become true.

While my men still scoured the surroundings for lianas, and while the pygmies kept twisting those already obtained to make them more pliable, the youngest hunters, headed by Mangara, attacked a giant tree on our side. As they went up the huge trunk, they tied to its branches and poles, so as to make a sort of gigantic rough ladder.

When they reached the last good-size branches, they built there a platform of poles and sticks. From there they began to give out a length of lianas knotted together, until the improvised rope reached the ground. Then down it they slid, like so many diminutive Tarzans.

Now the real excitement started.

The idea was to make at the end of the rope a seat in which a pygmy would sit, and the rest of the tribe bring him to his starting position for the great swing by pulling on another vegetable cable which they had passed over a huge branch of a tree farther back.

Higher and higher they would pull him, until the little trapeze rider would be suspended in midair at almost the same level as the platform. Then, at a word from the sultani, a pygmy would cut the holding cable, and the human pendulum would fly through space toward the river, over the whole

width of it, just skimming the surface, and try to seize with a wooden hook a branch on the opposite shore.

If he did not smash himself in the attempt, or was not snapped by a croc, or the rope did not break, the first contact with the other shore would be established. But—could it be done?

Mangara, who had volunteered, slid into his precarious seat. To be sure, Zutu had first given him the magic protection of a couple of rare feathers and an ivory amulet said to be of tremendous power. And I had arranged for Bob to create a diversion by shooting at the crocs at the proper moment both upstream and downstream. But would those precautions be enough?

Up and up Mangara was pulled, while the cameraman ground away film, until the two ropes—the one ending with the seat, and the one pulling the seat and Mangara up toward the sky—formed almost a straight line.

Then the sultani let out a cry, I another. There was the impact of a machete falling on wood, followed at once by a tattoo of shots. And down Mangara flew toward us, at terrific speed, swinging before our eyes, almost touching the water between the two zones of turmoil created by the shooting—then up, up, up, until he disappeared in the foliage of the tree opposite.

A breathless second, then the tiny figure appeared and the pendulum swung back.

Mangara hadn't made it. As he rushed toward us, we saw that he had lost the hook, the feathers, his little cap of hide—but he still appeared to be in one piece. He went past us, and up and up, and the pygmies threw another liana across, to try to stop him when he came back. They held to it with the

help of the porters, and it worked. Abruptly it halted the swinging of the giant pendulum.

Shaken, limp and giddy, Mangara was pulled out of his seat and laid on the ground. He had had enough with one try.

How many times we had to go through that performance, I do not remember exactly—six or seven, I believe. It cost the *nyoka* many victims, but it afforded the survivors some gargantuan snacks. And it cost me a pygmy fortune in salt and tobacco, for each time it took a greater inducement to obtain a new volunteer.

In the end, it was Mangara who did it, after all.

His sense of justice seemed outraged by the fact that he had failed, yes, but had got so much less for trying than his companions who had followed him and failed too. So he decided to try again—for the highest stake of the day.

This time, when Mangara reached the foliage of the opposite treetop, he did not swing back. A wild shouting and leap-broke out on our shore. For the hook had caught and Mangara hung onto it. Then, in some way or other, hidden to our eyes by the foliage, he managed to get out of his seat and fasten the piece of rope hanging from it to the tree.

As soon as the first link with the other shore was established, something wonderful and breathtaking took place.

From the platform on our side, other pygmies clambered along the cable, carrying around their torsos rolls of additional cables made from the knotted lengths of lianas.

Back and forth they went, with the agility of monkeys, all the time yelling, joking and laughing, as if the *nyoka* in the water hundreds of feet below them had suddenly ceased to exist. Finally some thirty parallel cables were stretched across

the river and another platform was completed in the top of the tree on the other shore.

Kotu-Kotu then wanted my boys to cross the span by hanging to those cables and prepare a second great ladder down the other tree. But they emphatically refused—and I couldn't blame them. I was giddy only from looking at those tiny figures suspended between earth and sky, two hundred feet or more above my head.

Like human spiders the hunters were already spinning their aerial cobwebs, braiding vegetable fibers into strong ropes, weaving vines between cable and cable, knotting them at every intersection, forming it all into something that was beginning to take the shape of a bridge.

The following day the "Brooklyn Bridge" of the equatorial jungle was completed. It looked flimsy, unsteady, unable to support even one of our heavily loaded porters. But frail as it appeared to be, it got the whole three hundred of us and every single piece of our baggage safely on the other side.

When everybody else had reached the Tikky-Tikky shore, the time came for Kotu-Kotu and me to go too. Now, looking back at that moment, I can realize as I embarked upon the crossing, I should have marveled at the ingenuity of those primitive human beings who had known since time immemorial the laws of the pendulum, with all that is important about strain, gravity, inertia and so on. But all I did during those interminable three hundred feet was to try not to look below me, and to keep desperate control of my nerves, for I have always suffered an unconquerable phobia for heights.

The sultani, ahead of me, was passing over with complete ease and even nonchalance.

On the other side, when I finally reached solid earth, my

legs gave way from under me. But what did I see through the haze in my eyes? Kotu-Kotu, the great sultani, crumpling with dizziness on a dead tree trunk! My own dizziness left me, and I could even laugh.

After so many long spells of bad luck, we now began to enjoy a steady one of good luck.

How much of a good one, I realized as soon as Kotu-Kotu, still grayish in the face, got up from his tree trunk, reached into the vegetation behind and, with a jerk, pulled out a little old man whose presence he had detected.

Introductions were made, and I was shaking the tiny hand of Mitwa, the sultani of the Tikky-Tikky, the son of Apwa-Libwa—"he who had died of elephant wounds near the Three Springs"—and one of the fathers-in-law of Kotu-Kotu.

A dozen of his men appeared, too, out of the ambush, and I would not be surprised if they had been watching every movement of ours ever since we had come in sight of the "River of Crocodiles."

All around us, there was rejoicing, shouting, backslapping and exchanging of jungle gossip. The din might have lasted for the rest of the day and late into the night, but I was in a hurry. And both Kotu-Kotu and Mitwa seemed to share my feeling. The latter had just arrived, it seemed. As he already knew all about us from his scouts, it was my turn to ask him for news. First of all, though, it was important to get the caravan of the porters on the move, and all those chattering little women out of the way.

Both sultanis proved most cooperative. With Mitwa's scouts, Zutu and the other older men helping in earnest, in a few minutes the safari was formed and on its way. The two sultanis, Mangara and a few other hunters remained for a

friendly cigarette with me, knowing that we could catch up with the ponderous safari in no time at all.

Sultani Mitwa had plenty to tell. The day before, the okapi had charged the palisade. It had splintered some trunks; but it had not attempted a kick—it still had not regained all its strength. The cage was ready, just as it was said by my voice “that had come all alone to tell the other Bwana, he of the beard.”

He, Mitwa, had wanted to come to meet us at the boundary of his territory. But for fear that something might happen while he was away, Sultani Mitwa had the cage placed with its open back against the palisade, just where the okapi had charged, and solidly fastened there. Then the splintered trunks had been removed and the cage’s solid door held in readiness, by a liana passed over a branch.

And—*wah!*—the okapi had seen the hole and watched it and watched it. As soon as noise and movement ceased, it got up, and slowly, for it still was very tired, sneaked into the hole. At once the door was lowered and fastened. The okapi had kicked and butted two or three times, but feebly and without hurting itself, for all the inside of the cage was made smooth and soft by a mattress of leaves.

And now, all was ready. Also the tipoye for Bwana Mandefu, who was sick. And men to carry the cage with the okapi inside, on its feet, were on their way, for Mitwa had sent two messengers to Abdullah the very morning the okapi had been found in the *zemu*, just as it was said by my voice “that had come alone to order it, all the way from the territories of Sultani Kotu-Kotu.”

Abdullah’s men—many of them—were now coming by a short way, all of them armed with machetes, and cutting a

wide path as they advanced, so that the journey for the okapi, as well as for the sick Bwana, might be speedy and easy.

And Chief Abdullah had sent word by the messengers that he himself was watching the building of a great stockade near the big road, so strong that the strongest okapi couldn't break it, so large that it contained a bit of a small stream for drinking water and much of the food that the okapi eats.

"Also," Mitwa continued, "Makulu-Kulu, my youngest son, wants to marry Katula, Kotu-Kotu's third daughter. The wedding should take place as soon as this great work of ours is finished, while all of Kotu-Kotu's tribe is here to participate in the festivities."

Now I was beginning to get the point! That was the reason for Kotu-Kotu's ready agreement to guide us to the *Maji ya Nyoka*, for Zutu's prompt assent to the crossing of the river, for everybody's eager, efficient cooperation in making liana bridge, cage, tipoye, palisades—everything!

"Also," concluded Mitwa, "we must go in a hurry, now. For everyone has done great work. And everyone is anxiously waiting for the great presents that your voice, Bwana, your own voice, has come by itself and said that everyone would get. I and my son and all my hunters. And Kotu-Kotu and his daughter and all his hunters. And all the women and children. And Abdullah and all his men. And . . ."

There was nothing to do but to take it and like it, and to thank God that everything was going so well—even if by the end I should find myself in the poorhouse.

"*Funga*, you rascal!" I said, before he could mention some other hundreds of people waiting for my bounty. "*Funga safari*—Let's go!"

The Marriage of Pygmies

JUST AS the previous weeks had been almost a continuous nightmare, the days that followed were like a short dream.

The removal of the okapi to the splendid palisade Abdullah had prepared not far from the Stanleyville-Irumu road, proceeded rapidly along the wide path opened by the hundreds of men that the chief had dispatched to assist us.

The journey in the padded cage seemed to have a subduing effect on the big animal. When it was let out into the enclosure, it seemed as if the okapi appreciated the quiet spacious new home, the running water, the growing plants, the shadowy shelters built in various corners. At once, it seemed to feel at home and satisfied. It began to eat, to drink, to prowl quietly around.

Soon after our arrival at the road, Charlie was taken by truck to the Irumu hospital, where I knew he would get the best care possible. The cameramen, having successfully completed "The Perils of the Jungle," went with him. They were to go on from Irumu to the village of Inghiresa by mail truck, then by foot to the base camp, where they would rest a while and wait for me until the okapi could be shipped to Europe and we could all continue together our journey toward Rwanda, the country of giants.

I felt a wonderful sense of accomplishment and relax-

ation. I had no inkling then that in a short time that superb okapi was to be killed by the parasite I have already mentioned, nor that in a few weeks Europe was to be plunged into war. I pitched my camp between the road and the pali-sade and prepared to enjoy the rest I so much needed.

The distribution of wages and rewards was a lengthy business, but amusing, too. It took up many afternoons, and all the francs, the bags of salt, the baskets of tobacco I had with me vanished, as well as the many more that the cameramen sent me from Irumu.

As soon as this chore came to an end, I made arrangements to witness the entire ceremony of the marriage of Katula and Makulu-Kulu. It was of particular interest to me, as I had never witnessed a wedding of pure pygmies nor known of anyone else who had.

Almost all Africans pay something to get a wife. It may be cows, sheep or goats; spears, arrows or knives; ivory, palm oil or copper. The girl's father must be paid a price which varies according to the customs and the wealth of the community.

The pygmies are the only exception. Owning no riches but those the jungle offers to everyone with equal generosity, valuing nothing but physical strength and courage, they dispense with the formality of prices and payments. Instead, for a marriage they prefer to put up a good show of mimicry and drama, which costs nothing, and gives everybody fun.

For this performance I had secured, so to speak, front-row seats by additional generous presents to Mitwa and to Kotu-Kotu (whose tribes had built for the occasion two brand-new villages not far apart, and at only half a day's march from my camp), as well as to the bride and the bridegroom.

The latter, Makulu-Kulu, was Mitwa's youngest son, and his name meant "Little Butterfly." He reached barely four feet three inches, and was small-boned and slender, but he was quite famous as a courageous, tireless hunter. In spite of his poetic-sounding name, that little creature emanated an unbelievably powerful, acrid smell.

The girl Katula was a good-humored, loud-laughing, plump four-foot-six. She was the third of about a dozen daughters that Kotu-Kotu had had by his various wives. There was never a dance where she was not the first to start, the last to quit, and the best one for leading the ranks of virgins and children.

When the day came, I saw everything, from the very beginning, from the fringes of Kotu-Kotu's village, which that morning was as silent as if it had been suddenly deserted by its entire population.

Makulu-Kulu, however, did not seem to pay the slightest attention to this startling quiet. Ignoring my presence as well, he emerged furtively from the surrounding wall of dark vegetation, slipped to the center of the clearing, and hid behind the trunk of a big tree which stood there in magnificent solitude.

In his hand was a sort of whistle, made of the hardened skin of a buffalo's tail, and into this he blew with all his breath. The effect was not particularly harmonious. Actually, to me, it was like long, sharp pins of sound painfully perforating my eardrums.

But the fascination of that music must have been irresistible to the pygmy feminine heart. For out of the low, arched door of a hut promptly issued the plumpest section of a girl, who, having straightened up and turned around, revealed herself as Katula.

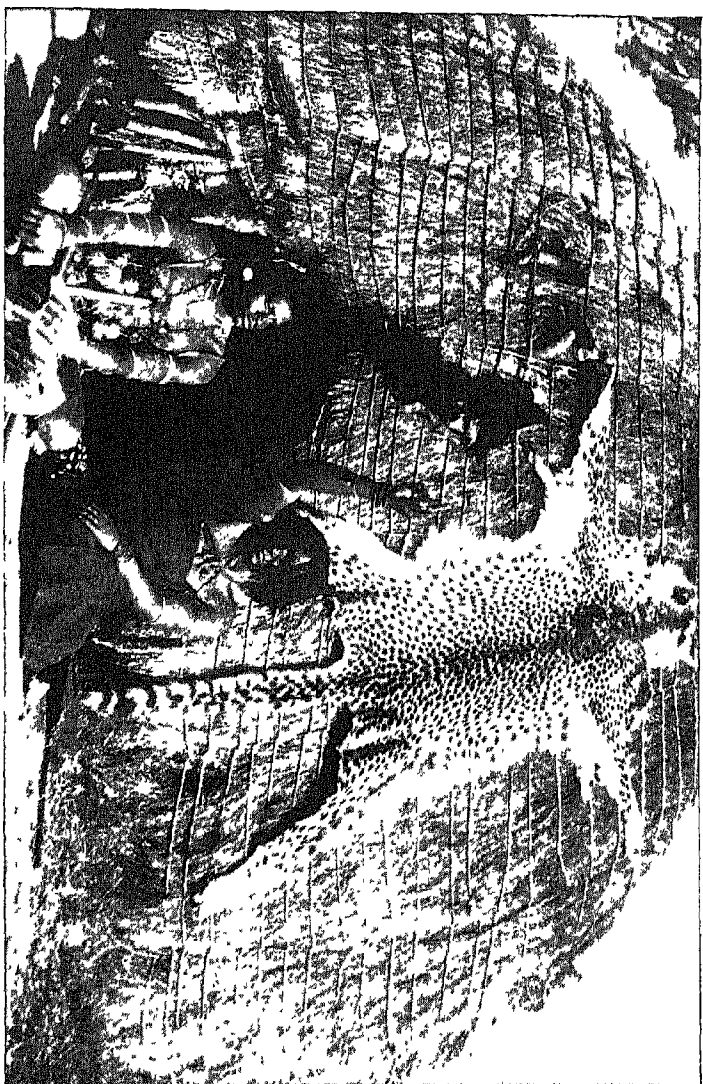
The belle of the day left you in no doubt about her feelings. She was shy. She was enchanted. And, above all, she was surprised. Eloquently, her quick, short steps expressed her sensations, carried her toward the big tree and beyond it, as if, in her virginal innocence, she were still unaware of the exact location of such an unexpected serenader.

This was the moment for Makulu-Kulu to undertake the next action prescribed by the pygmy's love etiquette. It meant that—"little butterfly" notwithstanding—he now had to assume the role of a frightening *n'gagi*, the giant gorilla which, though no longer living in that part of the jungle, remains in the mind of every pygmy as the most fearful and powerful foe.

Makulu-Kulu's imitation was certainly well meant, and it was conscientiously executed. His sudden chest-drumming was terrific. His wild leap toward the girl's ample back would probably have been acceptable even in the best gorilla circles. But when it came to snatching the girl up and lightly carrying her away in his forceful arms—as a gorilla would—Makulu-Kulu failed rather considerably.

Maybe he had fed too well the night before on the abundant flesh of a jungle buffalo I had killed. Maybe the girl's mind was too conscious of the supreme effort of self-defense expected from her by her invisible audience. The fact is that the very moment the enraged "*n'gagi*" landed on her back, the timid virgin Katula turned around with unexpected swiftness—and—bang!—she gave him a resounding sock in his right eye.

Then, instead of his lifting her up, she fell on top of him, and began to hammer with both her fists what little remained exposed of her betrothed's anatomy.



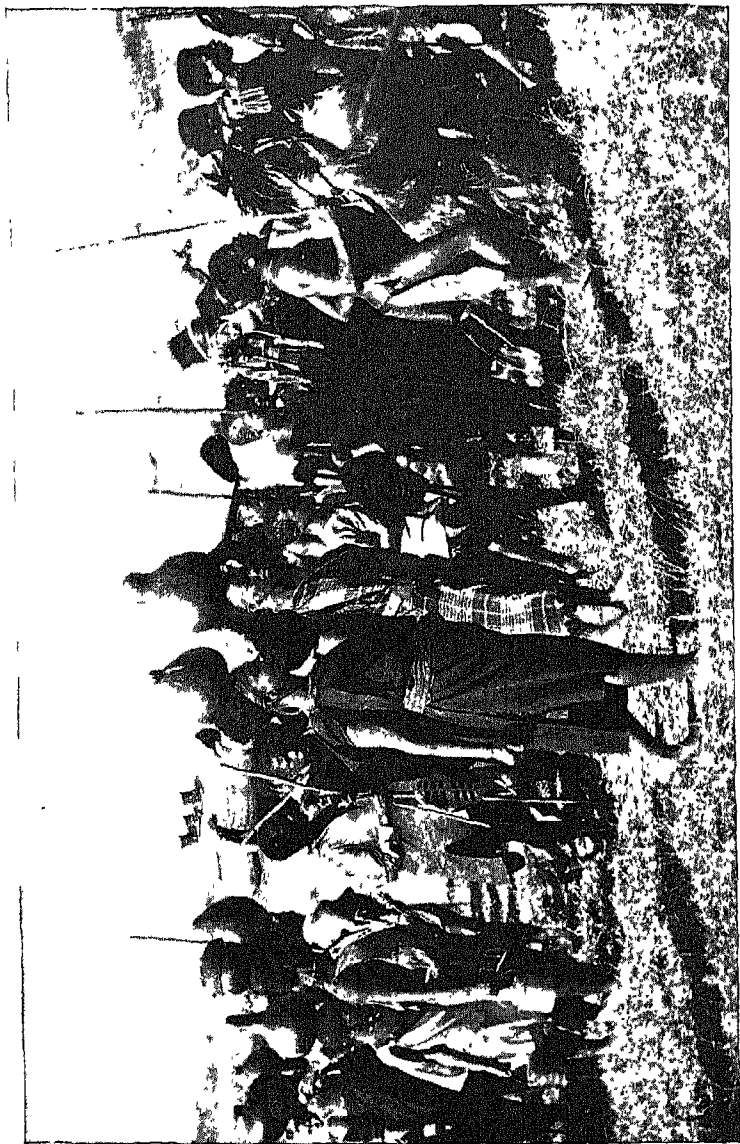
Pythonesse Twadehili at her work



Hurrying to finish the hut for the "New Pythoness"



Ramini, the "New Pythoness"



Serious crowds celebrating the "birth" of the "New Pythoness"

Any lover's exuberance might have felt slightly cooled by such a reception. Not Makulu-Kulu's, however. It took some squirming and twisting and pushing and pulling on his part before he could manage to free himself from the imposing weight of the girl's charms. But when he succeeded, and with an elegant somersault sprang to his feet, his face was not only beaming, it was radiant—tightly closed, swollen eye not excepted.

"See what a girl I have picked up for myself?" his cocky posture seemed to say to the surrounding world of diminutive huts and gigantic trees. "Think how much work she is going to do for me, as soon as we are through with this little matter of espousals!"

Katula got up, too, her belligerency apparently quenched for the moment. And with giggling coquetry she brushed dust off wherever she should have had a skirt.

But the *n'gagi* in Makulu-Kulu was far from quenched. Nor was he fooled by this sudden show of meekness. Some fleet footwork took him around and around her, until he thought he had secured a strategically sound position.

Then, again that gnome of a Tikky-Tikky sprang. Only this time, prudently renouncing the lift-and-carry plan, he shrewdly adopted the much safer grab-and-drag system. And tugging mightily at the girl's arms, he began to haul her toward the jungle wall.

Matters were not to prove so simple, however.

Before they could reach the entrance of the path leading to Mitwa's and Makulu-Kulu's village, out of Katula's wide mouth a piercing yell erupted.

In answer to it, out of the "deserted" huts dozens of hunters streamed. The air was filled with the glittering of their

machetes, knives and spears. The space shook with insults and threats and murderous cries. The ground quivered with their leaps and trampling and forward charging—but they took care to allow plenty of time for the lovers to flee and for me to follow.

When the party was almost at Mitwa's village, and the couple were about to find safety in the hut set aside for them, the pandemonium redoubled, and grew until it pervaded the whole jungle. Now the Tikky-Tikky hunters, too, sprang into action, as if to defend the son of their own sultani. And on both sides the hunters did their best to overcome the approaching foe, not with the impact of spears and knives and machetes, but with the might of cries and yells and leaps.

Finally, the two groups came in contact. With every appearance of an indomitable fierceness, they mingled together. Women and children rushed in to join them from every side. Gradually the screaming throng blended into a spasmodic human ring of wildly dancing, gesticulating Lilliputians, a ring which closed in around the hut where the lovers in the meanwhile had taken refuge.

It was the *grand tableau final*.

The leading actors were not left out of it. With perfect timing, out of the hut's door Katula emerged in her usual reverse fashion, roundest exposure first. The brusquely jerked-out figure of her spouse followed her, like a Jack out of the box.

Suddenly released, Makulu-Kulu staggered. Barely avoiding sprawling face-down on the ground, he recovered his equilibrium, and stepped back. There he stood, in all his majestic stature of four feet three, proudly blinking his one working eye.

You could see that already he was foretasting the joy of having conquered a mate who, tomorrow and every day thereafter, would do all his work. Who, on her powerful back, would carry his whole larder, all the furniture and furnishings of his menage, plus, of course, every one of the many children she would bear him.

Up she stood beside him, timidly shuffling her feet, shyly bending a dimpled cheek on a rounded shoulder. Then, as if to give her man and master a final proof, a solemn promise of the strength she would put at his disposal—bang!—she let go another, most efficient blow, which magnificently shut his still intact eye. He, carried by sheer momentum, and she, spurred by wifely solicitude, both instantly disappeared into the hut.

The door was tightly closed from the inside, and a clamorous applause of heartfelt approval and general blessing rose outside from the overjoyed crowd.

As I began to walk back to camp, I decided that, as soon as we reached Rwanda, I must not fail to arrange to watch the marriage ceremonies of another, amazingly different people, the giant Watussi. The contrast would undoubtedly be striking—and instructive. For, though geographically near each other, nothing could be more unlike than those two worlds.

On the one hand, here I was in the gloomy, steaming, miasmatic jungle, with its overpowering vegetation, its multitudes of freakish, cruel beasts, and its tiny inhabitants whose mentality and general manner of existence showed little change from those of the Bushman of humanity's dark beginnings.

While over there, on the eastern slopes of the Great Rift, we would find ourselves in the midst of mountainous scenery

of indescribable beauty, in a land swept by healthy breezes, among thousands of little gardens and vast herds of majestic cattle kept by the earth's tallest giants—the pure descendants, unique survivors, of one of man's most ancient civilizations.

A few hundred miles farther on that north-south road which had brought us from the Uele, and from the gloomy haunts of the "living fossil," we would soar up to the glowing kingdom of the "living Pharaohs"!

The Living Pharaohs

"MY OWN little cow," a Watussi lover croons when he grows sentimental. "You are as beautiful as a brown heifer. Your figure is so bovine; your face as long and triangular as that of a sacred cow!" And when his loved one breathes, "Ah!" he may continue in ecstasy, "The harmony of your voice! It is as sweet and delightful as a morning bellow!"

Does the girl resent being courted by such comparisons? Far from it. Nine times out of ten, at this point she excuses herself for a moment and rushes back to her mother's hut. Not to powder her aristocratic little nose, but to enhance to its maximum her admired resemblance to a cow by donning quickly her proudest ornament—a most realistic double-horned headdress made of raffia and colored beads.

Do not think that Watussi girls are bovine, either in their physique or mentality. On the contrary, they are usually extremely pretty, exquisitely dainty, amusingly full of mischief and vitality—the most feminine, graceful, intelligent young women of all Africa.

The only trouble is that their men and "masters" are, in a manner of speaking, so wrapped up in their cattle that in no other field can they discover more precious riches to which to liken—and with which to honor properly—the object of their love.

The Watussi are unique, as is their country, and their very appearance is extraordinary. In fact, the whole atmosphere about them, as well as most of their customs and superstitions, and even their gorgeous cattle, seems to have survived a distant and superb period of human history, to have been miraculously lifted and salvaged before the crumbling of the Pharaoh empire of ancient Egypt.

Located in the center of the Dark Continent, about equidistant from Cairo and Cape Town, and halfway between the Atlantic and Indian oceans, Rwanda is a small spot difficult to find on the average map. Yet it contains more marvels, contrasts and exaggerations than any other African land.

It lies just below the equator, but nights are so cold that no respectable Watussi will go to bed before half a dozen virgins have warmed up the connubial couch for himself and his wife. Though live volcanoes surround this mountainous kingdom and have covered its borders with patches of black, petrified lava; though craters of other, long-dead volcanoes stud it with innumerable lakes, Rwanda's meager eighteen thousand square miles are inhabited by three million people, making it, after Egypt, Africa's most populated territory.

The bulk of this population is formed by the Bahutu, Negroes of the usual Bantu type, and the only people of Rwanda who are normal in physical characteristics and ordinary in manner of life. Patient, obstinate, shrewd peasants, the Bahutu have cultivated to perfection every bit of ground not taken up by water, stone or forest. Yet, until quite recently, this contradictory land which nine years out of ten would give prodigal crops, every tenth year or so was afflicted by terrible droughts, each followed by a famine which wiped out hundreds of thousands of the Bahutu.

These calamities, however, one man managed to stop almost singlehandedly in less than three years. Governor Voisin, an old friend of mine, brought about this almost magical result simply by persuading the Moami, the King of Rwanda, to issue a couple of innocent-appearing laws. One prescribed that each of his subjects must plant a tree every month as long as he should live; the other, that each hut should be permanently surrounded by a patch of the hardy, prolific manioc, which no drought can kill, and whose root, poisonous when fresh, gives a substantial food when dried and pulverized.

This meant the planting of a billion trees in one generation, the halting of soil erosion due to the deforestation of centuries, the hope for the return of more regular annual rainfall—and, meanwhile, food at each man's door against the consequences of recurring drought.

Charles Voisin didn't have to worry about these orders being carried out. For what the Moami says goes. His word is divine law; and despite the presence of a Belgian Governor, he preserves intact, and sometimes still uses, absolute power of life and death over his subjects.

This brings us to the mysterious, spectacular race of 80,000 or so Watussi, all giants and all of princely blood, whose men rule the country under the Moami, the noblest among them, and undoubtedly the noblest sovereign in the entire world, for he is the thirty-ninth consecutive king in his family.

No one has yet been able to explain why the Watussi man is one, two, sometimes three feet taller than the comely woman of his race. While she only rarely reaches five feet ten inches, and never six feet, his average height is above seven feet. Seven feet nine or ten inches is a quite common height;

and one occasionally meets a Watussi topping the eight-foot mark. In fact, I know a youth who is generally called "Deo Gratia," from the exclamation that some astounded Catholic missionaries let out when they first saw him. And no wonder—for "Deo Gratia" is all of eight feet nine inches tall—and thinks nothing of it.

To try to convey the impression made by the Watussi on seeing them the first time, I will recall that first encounter I had then, some fifteen years ago, with Watussi princes, which is still vivid in my mind.

Until that day I had thought the 170 pounds I was carrying around, more or less well distributed over my 5 feet 11½ inches of height, were not so bad or so soft. But then, all of a sudden, I did not feel so sure about it.

The Watussi princes who awakened me to my shortcomings were not even all young. Some of them were in their twenties, it is true. And never before in my extensive journeys through America and Europe and Asia, or during the ten years I had already roamed through Africa, had I seen such perfect examples of broad shoulders swelling into extraordinarily well-developed chests, nor of narrow hips so harmoniously tapering to such slim, muscular legs.

But in the group were also two old men, one seven feet nine inches tall, and certainly old enough to be my grandfather; the other, even taller, even older. And both of them appeared as straight and hard as the spears each lightly carried in one slender hand, as strong and supple as the huge bow held in the other, as light and graceful as the white and red toga elegantly accentuating their proud carriage.

Their light brown, lean faces, seemingly even longer under the high, elaborate coiffure of thick gray hair; the poised,

dignified serenity of their smiles, exhibiting flawless, gleaming teeth—these completed the effect.

"They are beautifully preserved," I thought; "no doubt about it. But surely they are rare specimens. And I would like to see how these skyscrapers of creatures would follow me in a long march, or run with me on a tough hunt."

This gave me a little consolation—but only briefly. For just then the taller of the ancient ones, with a majestic gesture, invited me to come and be a guest at his brother's house.

As soon as I assented and he started walking, majesty vanished. It vanished from him who sprang ahead of me with the gait of a gazelle. It vanished from me, who, panting, tried to keep up with him and his companion. It even vanished from the gorgeous scenery surrounding us, which suddenly transformed itself into a dizziness of crazily steep mountains crowded there for the sole purpose of humiliating and breaking down a poor devil of an explorer.

Up and down half a dozen of those mountains we went, at the pace of a hook-and-ladder rushing to a five-alarm fire. Then, without even slowing down a second, the less ancient of the two ancestors cheerily pointed somewhere toward the skies to show me his brother's place. Through a curtain of dripping sweat, I saw it—a huge house with pointed thatched roof, but looking like a miniature hut, perched on the very top of a seventh peak.

To make that last ascent, I had to call on all my will power and face-saving self-discipline. When finally we reached the top, and, exhausted, I had collapsed on a stool of carved ebony, the elder of my companions bowed low from the waist, calmly said a few words of polite salutation and promptly turned back.

Making an effort to check my panting and to quiet the violent pounding of my heart, I asked in astonishment where he was going now, with such a haste.

"Oh," answered the other old man, "the sun is still high. He has not to hurry at all." And with a malicious twinkling in his sharp brown eyes, he added, "He has come here just to honor the visiting stranger. Now he is going to *his* house."

"Is his house on one of those mountains?" I asked.

"No," he answered, his face relaxed and free from perspiration, his voice quiet and controlled. "It is just the other side of the road. No farther from it than from the road to here."

The Giants' Elixir of Healthy Life

NOW, BACK from my tenth African expedition, at the end of my fourteenth year actually spent on African soil and of my third extensive sojourn in Rwanda, I feel that I know the Watussi a little better, and that I have learned, at least, some of the simple secrets of their splendid fitness, of their startling average of healthy, active longevity.

One is their diet. What they eat, and always with moderation, is mainly milk, cream, butter, several kinds of unfermented cheeses, and honey, bananas and boiled vegetables. Meat has very little part in their meals, because for some reason it doesn't seem to agree with Rwanda's climate. We ourselves, while there, developed a sudden dislike for meat.

Another secret might be that of planned fasting. This they use periodically as a preventive of illness, often as a preparation for strenuous physical exertion, and always as a first treatment when illness comes. Which, even to our "civilized" minds, makes more sense than the gorging in which the Wandande indulge anytime they can, expecting a belt made of okapi hide to take care of any consequences.

A third rule quite generally observed is temperance in drinking. The Watussi's only alcoholic drink is made of

honey, milk and bananas. Each of these products is innocent enough. But once they are mixed according to the proper recipe, and fermented the right amount of time, there emerges the most powerful dynamite of a sour-sweet, treacherous liquid I have ever tasted.

Fortunately for the perfect preservation of the Watussi race, their ancient, wise ancestors—perhaps after some personal experimenting with the mixture—must have grown afraid of the consequences that too convivial customs could bring upon the future of their people. So, even then knowing how easily one drinks more than is prudent when many people are gathered together in a jovial mood, they established one of their strictest taboos—that against drinking or eating in the presence of anyone save the immediate members of one's family.

How faithfully this taboo is still today preserved was proved to us when we wished to take some movies of a family around the "table"—the beautifully shaped flower of colored clay which occupied the center of the floor of every Watussi hut. We had its four semi-circular petals covered with fresh banana leaves. Wooden plates and bottles and pots, all scrupulously clean and filled with appetizing foods and drinks, were disposed on the tender green "tablecloth." But when it came to bringing a bottle to the mouth, not even the omnipotent Moami succeeded in persuading anyone to make any more than a token gesture with a bottle previously emptied of the last drop of liquid and carefully scrubbed and dried.

The fourth rule, and probably the most effective of all, is the one regulating a man's physical activity.

From his earliest childhood, the Watussi boy spends a good part of his day, practically naked, in the clean, exhilarating

mountain air, running, jumping, throwing diminutive arrows and javelins, and learning the elements of the traditional dances of the race, each of which, besides being an accomplishment of great beauty and exquisite grace, represents an entire course of calisthenics.

When he is eight, he starts "school," that is, every day he gets a two-hour lesson from the nearest "Maker of Intelligence," which involves a brisk walk of twenty miles or so, to the teacher's house and back.

The lessons continue until he is fourteen, all his spare time being taken up by his efforts to reach excellency in dancing and jumping, without which he never could satisfy his highest ambition of being admitted to the corps of the Moami's pages.

After serving between forty and fifty months in the court, he is ready to marry the girl he loves. Then, for some years to come, the affairs of state—that is, the chieftainship and the care of the Bahutu families and cultivations on the slopes of the hill confided to his rule by the King and on the top of which he has built his home—do not occupy too much of his time. So he still participates in the tribal dances and jumping competitions in which, tall as he may have grown to be, he still must jump at least as high as his own stature, and lightly, gracefully, without the least manifestation of effort.

What startling results the average youthful Watussi prince can obtain through his daily training and steady, passionate desire for improvement, my companions of the expedition and I were able to see when Moami Rudahigwa ordered a sort of Olympic games in our honor. For this event, from every corner of the realm the best youth of each province flocked

toward Nyanza, Rwanda's capital, to display their prowess before their sovereign, his court and his guests.

The moment King Rudahigwa led us from the coolness of his palace to the sunny expanse of the enormous square which faced it, the whole space before us surged to life. And with such a riot of savage rhythms, of violent colors, of barbaric motions that we felt wrenched away from the present, flung into a past when mankind was boldly entering the first maturity of civilization.

Superb Watussi warriors leaped forward, their small heads covered with lion manes, their wide shoulders and arrogant chests adorned with embroideries of colored beads and old gold. Their unbelievably narrow hips tightly bound by long antelope skins fringed with otter, their snapping ankles and flashing wrists encircled by rows of silvery bells, they flung their soul into the traditional "dance of the lion," and sprang like creatures of flame.

Young pages of the King's retinue followed, and imitated their elders. Mouths open in ferocious grimaces, shining teeth clenched, big brown eyes sparkling, heads disdainfully thrown back, they, too, challenged imaginary enemies to mortal combats. Contortions of limbs that a leopard might envy; fantastic bounds in complete disregard for the law of gravity; heads spun round and round as if to give momentum to a missile to be thrown at the enemy; feints, attacks, retreats, momentary defeats, sudden recoveries, new, more audacious thrusts—these went on while unceasingly the Bahutu musicians whipped the yelling dancers and the clamoring audience alike into a crescendo of excitement which finally exploded in a high-pitched cry.

"I, for my Moami, am ready to die!" shouted every man

and boy in the crowd. And every woman clapped her hands, in wordless homage to her King.

Then the Moami raised a hand, and every sound died in a sudden silence. Everybody stood motionless and followed Rudahigwa's gaze. There, in a corner of the immense square, we saw slim figures take a few easy steps, effortlessly abandon the ground and one after the other soar high up over a thin reed, descending in a graceful curve, landing lightly, composedly.

Though many times I had admired Watussi athletes jumping, I could not believe my own eyes.

"But," I said, "they are actually jumping almost as high as their own stature. You weren't joking, then, the day you told me so?"

"Oh, no," Rudahigwa replied quietly. "As a matter of fact, some of them jump even higher. For this is our greatest national sport. It is the one thing that even the few undisciplined young men take most seriously and earnestly."

And he asked us to go and stand under the reed, which had just been raised. Later, I measured the distance myself. It was exactly at 8 feet $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches from the ground, and the bit of anthheap from which the jumpers took off was $2\frac{1}{8}$ inches high. That next jump, therefore, was an amazing 8 feet 1 inch.

Yet, one after another, the handsome athletes soared above our heads. It was all so effortless, so noiseless, that at a certain moment Charlie, believing the competition ended, started forward to express his enthusiasm to the Moami. But a Watussi, just in that second, was in the air above us. With the quickness of lightning, I saw him throw his body forward, stretch out his thin legs. And, with a twist of his back, he

lengthened the jump by several feet, clearing Charlie's head by just a few inches.

Landing lightly, the prince instantly turned to offer apologies. He had spent a lot of time with us, and his quick mind had picked up and stored away many American expressions. So, unconsciously, he ended that fiesta of barbaric splendor on just the right note.

"Okay, Bwana Mandefu?" he inquired solicitously. And to bring us back completely from the customs and illusions of ancient Egypt to the slang and realities of today, he added with a flashing smile: "I'll be teetotally damned."

With the years, the number of duties of a Watussi prince steadily increases—and so do the herds of his cattle, his responsibilities and his wives. For all this forms a kind of chain. The Moami gives you the control of a new hill. With it goes the stipend of more cattle, a new wealth you wish to show off, another house you build on the top of the newly acquired hill, another wife you get to be the mistress of that house, more Bahutu peasants and cultivations for you to supervise. That means less dancing and jumping, but much more walking and marching and visiting. Which keeps you fit and on your toes and everybody busy and happy, including your various wives, each of whom is the queen of her own house, her children, her servants and slaves, and never does she have occasion to interfere or quarrel with the others.

Then there is the hunting. The richer and more important the Watussi becomes, the more slaves he needs and acquires to protect himself and his increasing family and herds of cattle from the attacks of wild animals, particularly from the aggressive black-spotted leopard of the mountains.

Here is where the Batwa pygmies come into the picture, the fiercest and most primitive men in existence.

These people possess none of the lovable qualities of the Mambuti and Tikky-Tikky pygmies of the equatorial jungle. One almost never gets to catch even a glimpse of these puny little gnomes, who seldom reach more than half of the Watussi's stature. Cruel, filthy, savage, still armed only with stone-pointed and bone-bladed weapons as primitive as those of prehistoric times, but knowing all Nature's deadliest poisons and its darkest secrets, these Batwa slaves are invaluable to the Watussi. Almost as much today as in the past, when they were regularly used for carrying to an inexorable, bloody conclusion every kind of crime, execution, revenge and guerilla warfare that the superior race of giants wished accomplished.

When a leopard is known to be near by—that is, within thirty or forty miles—the Watussi prince goes hunting, using his Batwa slaves in place of dogs. He goes hunting to keep his legs trained, his eyes alert, his arrows sharp, and perhaps also for the thrill of the dangerous chase. But primarily, he goes to make sure that another foe of his precious cattle is promptly eliminated.

For the cows of the Watussi are as remarkable as their owner, and are his greatest wealth, his continuous preoccupation, his well-justified pride.

The most numerous type—there are about two million of them—are the *inyambo*, "those with long long horns," and they do, in fact, have horns usually measuring twelve feet or more from point to point.

The most striking ones, numbering a hundred thousand, are the *insanga*, or royal cows, which belong to the Moami

and are spread throughout the country in small groups of forty or fifty head. To them are reserved the best pastures of every province. Each of these cows has a Bahutu custodian who not only takes scrupulous care of the health of his charge, but keeps its coat as shining as that of a thoroughbred horse.

Both types are not only extremely beautiful, but are perfectly aware of their beauty, and also evidently conscious of the ornaments of silver, beads and braided grass which embellish their necks, heads, tails and horns.

To preserve these breeds in all their perfection, practically all the milk is left to the calves. The small remainder is reserved exclusively to the herdsman, who belong to clans enjoying special exemptions and privileges, and who, together with their envied position, inherit a whole lore of secrets, which range from veterinary practice to animal training.

How well trained the Watussi cattle are, is made evident during the frequent exhibitions which are the delight of princes. Well-nourished, their coats and horns shining in the sun, *inyambo* and *insanga* pass in review, obediently following each order of their custodian. They advance with great dignity, and when called upon, they stop, like well-trained circus animals, before the audience. And there they stand and prance, listening to the speech that each herdsman makes, with loud cries and wild gyrations, to recount all the marvels of the beast in his care.

Incidentally, if you are a philatelist, you would be interested in these cows for another reason. For it is a fact that, if the King sends a special messenger to a chief, tradition compels him to present his courier with an *insanga*. The cow constitutes the postage for the monarch's personal correspond-

ence. Surely the largest stamp that has ever been used in any country!

The meat of these cows is strictly taboo. And this taboo is considerably strengthened by the frequent massages given to the animals with crocodile blood, which is considered extremely poisonous.

These splendid cows, so unlike the breeds of the surrounding countries, are not only one of the most fascinating sights of Rwanda, but also contribute some light toward the solution of the puzzle of the Watussi's origins. For the only beasts to which they bear resemblance are the oxen carved in the monuments of ancient Egypt. And the care given them by the Watussi has many points of similarity to the Egyptians' cult for the Apis.

Furthermore, the Watussi are not Negroes, but splendid specimens of the Hamite race. They are the only people of Central Africa to read the future in the intestines of fowls, and to classify animals as pure and impure. Their various clans have different animals for totems. Their political organization is a feudal system, an absolute monarchy with unlimited power. Their royal dynasty is believed to be of celestial origin, as was that of the Pharaohs, to whom the Watussi have a striking somatic resemblance, and their pastoral habits and many superstitions are similar.

All this seems to indicate clearly that the Watussi are the purest descendants of the ancient Egyptians. Why and when their forebears left the shores of the Nile; how they succeeded in making their way across the darkest regions of the Dark Continent; through what epic vicissitudes they finally reached Rwanda with some of their equally pure-bred cattle—these are mysteries which no one has yet been able to solve.

Least of all the Watussi themselves. For their ancestors, once they had reached the end of their great migration, evidently decided to entrench themselves securely in their new kingdom, to destroy or confuse every trace or record of their journey and origin, and to avoid fiercely every contact with the outside world.

And so successfully, so jealously, was their seclusion guarded throughout scores of generations, that only four decades ago a mere chance brought about the discovery of Rwanda and its unique race of rulers—the living Pharaohs.

A Giant Marries

DEEPLY ATTACHED as the Watussi still are to the ancient traditions of their noble race, a marriage among them is an elaborate affair, and one which provides the whole region with a lively, lasting interest. The only instance we were able to witness took place in the village where lived Simbanyi, the Watussi prince to whose wedding we succeeded in getting invited.

Things began to happen the moment we arrived at this Watussi community, the village being the capital of a district and therefore a place where several princes had one of their homes. We had just exchanged hasty greetings with the expectantly gathered crowd when a sudden hush attracted our attention toward a strange, multilegged, noisy monster in the act of crawling out of an enclosure which, we learned, belonged to the father of Taltera, the bride-to-be.

Among applauding comments, the monster advanced. It soon revealed itself as a long, wide mat under which hid Taltera, crying desperately, in the middle of a group of other virgins who tried to console her for what was going to happen to her. And, commented a ribald youth near us, to console themselves, at the same time, for what was not yet going to happen to them. For marriage is a status eagerly coveted by all Watussi maidens.

Noisily the human centipede proceeded. Slowly it crossed the village square. Then it squeezed itself through the narrow entrance to the new group of huts that Simbanyi's father had prepared and presented to his son.

The bridegroom, at that moment, made a courteous gesture of invitation, and together with some of his best friends we followed him on the track of the "monster," just in time to see it disappear into the dimness of the principal hut. There, the girls discarded the mat and, still in a compact group, filed into a bedchamber. They left the bride there and rushed out to join us in the anteroom, while thick fiber curtains fell to close the bedchamber's door.

Slightly embarrassed, we stood there, not knowing quite what to do, when the bridegroom, leaving us abruptly, without a word lifted the curtains and disappeared beyond.

"Bride!" the girl friends began to shout all around us. "Bride! May everything be well with you!" And gracefully they executed elaborate dance steps, while they clapped their hands discreetly.

Not so discreet was another young man who, grim determination all over his face, detached himself from our group and marched directly into the bedchamber. We were shocked, of course, and expected that any minute the intruder would be violently expelled.

But the village's oldest man, while suavely showing us outside, explained that the intruder was only the bride's brother in the act of accomplishing his most sacred duty. The girls in the anteroom were still wishing the bride that everything might be well with her. But tradition imposed that her brother should be near at that moment. And not only that. In order to establish once and for all that, despite the marriage, her

family's protection was still at her side, he must sleep the whole of the first night between her and his new brother-in-law. All of them dressed—but all in the same bed.

The second day we were somewhat relieved to notice a certain quiet around the group of freshly built huts. And above all, to see the brother of Taltera again in circulation. Finally, the newly wed couple were to be given a chance.

The old man who was watching after us quickly disillusioned us. Certainly not, said he. The ceremony was still far from complete. For at least a couple of nights, three if the girl was clever, four if she was absolutely first class, it was to be expected that she would put up a stubborn, if well-mannered, resistance against her spouse. Only in that way could she show unequivocally that she was not at all disposed to become just a chattel, a slave of her husband.

At long last she would, so to speak, fly a white flag. But one could not expect a real gentleman to take immediate advantage of a young lady's surrender. At least, Simbanyi would not do so, for he belonged to one of Rwanda's best and most ancient families. Instead, he would be very gentle and patient and considerate, so as not to frighten the shy maiden who was now his, at his discretion.

How long this second part of the act imposed by tradition would last, concluded the old man, naturally depended on various imponderable circumstances. Meanwhile, the whole village was seething with good-humored excitement.

Every morning Taltera's maiden friends gathered around the main hut of her new home, and asked if she was still on the winning side. And as long as her voice answered from inside a somewhat wistful "Yes," the girls would compliment

her, sadly shake their heads and make with her a rendezvous for the next day.

And each morning, after the girls had gone, Simbanyi's friends came to ask him a similar question. As long as his voice answered a somewhat wistful "No," they would offer him a couple of clearly stated suggestions, shrug their shoulders and promise they would return on the morrow.

Until, even the best of manners having a limit, the morning came when the answers were reversed.

"No," said the bride, coyly appearing for an instant in the doorway.

"Yes," said the bridegroom, showing for a moment his blissfully happy brown face.

And "Hurrah!" said everybody in Banyarwanda, which is Rwanda's local lingo.

As for my companions, Charlie shook his head with a heartfelt "I'll be darned!" but Bob, who was fat, and incorrigibly sentimental—he could not even speak, so overwhelmed was he. The expression of his moonlike face, however, revealed his awed admiration for such delicate, gracious customs. He gave me the impression that he was storing them away in his head for the day when we all would return to so-called civilization and he would find the girl of his dreams. A brotherless girl, I charitably wished for him!

The Black Mamba and the Farmer's Wife

ONE SUBJECT I have intentionally omitted up to now is that of snakes.

The reasons for this are two. First of all, many as are the curses of the jungle, snakes are not among the major ones. And, second, all my most memorable experiences with snakes happened to take place in southern Africa, well below the belt of great jungles and high mountains with which I have been dealing up to now.

Of course, it would be simple to leave snakes entirely out. But were I to do so, I would be giving an incomplete picture of the regions which lie "south of the Sahara." And I would also be omitting several unforgettable adventures, some of which are extremely unpleasant to my memory, and others which are not entirely so. To say this is to concede a good deal, for, I must confess, I hate snakes.

This dislike of mine goes back a long time—as far as my earliest childhood. But it changed into wholehearted hatred—and into a sickening sort of dread—from the day I paid a short visit to the De Wit farm in the Marandellas district of Southern Rhodesia.

The worst of it is that snakes either reciprocate my feelings,

or I have had particularly bad luck with them. The fact is that they have loomed exceptionally large among the list of the foes whose wrath I have had to face during my African life; and but for the touching devotion of some natives and the infinite pains they took to salvage my life, I would not be here to tell the stories of the python and of the cobra. Nor that of the black mambas, which is even more gruesome in a way, though in another way some good came out of it at the very end.

But I will start from the beginning, and describe the events I witnessed at the De Wit farm, just as they happened. The only liberty I shall take with truth is that I will use fictitious names.

The man I'm going to call Jan De Wit was an Afrikaander of about fifty. He was hugely built, heavy-boned, sluggish-minded, and solid as a granite boulder—and just as tender of heart. To top it all, the Marandellas District Commissioner who first told me about him said he was "a frightful bore and a born practical joker."

"For what you want," concluded the D.C., "there isn't a better place in the whole Marandellas district. But watch out for him. And—uh—stay well away from his wife!"

I was looking for traces of ancient mining, not for other people's wives. However, it puzzled me that a correct gentleman of the D.C.'s caliber should come out with a remark like that.

"What's the matter with her?" I asked. "Or with me? Are you afraid that my virtue may be imperiled?"

"On the contrary! No, no." And the brick-red sun tan of his face took an even darker hue. "Elsa De Wit is young,

beautiful, delicate. She has the face of a Christmas-tree angel. And she is just as innocent."

"Well!" I thought.

"Only," continued the D.C., "Elsa married Big Jan without loving him. Without even knowing him—just faithfully carrying through the arrangement her father made for her with Jan's family. In Cape Town. You see, she arrived here only four months ago. And the vast crude veldt has proved to be a bitter land for her—filled with fears and tears—poor child!"

"But," I said, "couldn't she divorce him, go back home?"

"There is no way out. You know these Boers. The very word 'divorce' would shock Elsa. It would enrage her family as much as it would Big Jan. And he is jealous as an ogre of her. I have no doubt he would kill without a moment's hesitation anyone who paid her the slightest attention. As a matter of fact, there is a person in such danger—young Doctor Van Overbeek, our veterinary."

"Is he in love with her?"

"Head over heels, though he doesn't know it himself—or doesn't want to admit it. Actually, I would appreciate your keeping an eye on him, if he comes to the farm while you are staying there."

How aptly the D.C. had summed up the situation, I began to see for myself the moment I reached the farm.

Before the main building, a sort of one-story shack of unbaked bricks that badly needed whitewashing, stood a low, open car, or truck—I couldn't decide which. The vehicle was so old that it had become stripped of all such non-essentials as mudguards, running boards, doors, windows, windshield and so on. All it had left as body was little more than a roof of

planks sustained by four poles, and the home-made seat which a folded blanket covered.

I also noticed, but feigned not to see, the hurry with which two young people had shot to their feet as soon as my car had entered the uneven court between the house and the stable and other outbuildings. My impression, however, was that the two had been very near each other on the step, holding hands.

When I stepped out of the car, an expression of relief flooded Mrs. De Wit's large, soft blue eyes and the equally blue but hard, defiant ones of the man I knew in advance was the veterinary. It seemed to please them both to see that the new arrival was a stranger—a man who, in all probability, knew nothing of their troubles, they thought.

I had just finished introducing myself and explaining the purpose of my visit, when I heard the drumming of hoofs beating on bare rock, far behind the house. The stiffness which at once straightened the doctor's wide shoulders, the poorly acted casualness with which Mrs. De Wit glided to the corner of the stoep farthest from us, told me that her husband was coming, and how little at ease they both were.

It was none of my business, of course. But it was pathetic the way those two, whether they realized it or not, were in love, and in need of each other, and at the same time almost as scared of themselves as of the rider who was galloping toward the house. So, following an impulse, I lit a cigarette. And, after a puff or two, I broke off half of it, let it drop and lit what remained.

As the conversation became artificially animated and loud, I unobtrusively repeated the operation. By the time Jan reined his horse to a harsh, rearing halt in the courtyard, I was smoking another cigarette, whole this time.

His mind might have been "sluggish," but certainly his eyes were not. They darted right and left. In a moment he had seen everything there was to be seen—and something more. Then he stared at me. To his wife or the doctor he did not address a word. Of me he asked bluntly: "Who are you? What do you want here?"

I was tempted to tell him to go to the devil, he was such an ill-mannered bully. But, after all, I was on his farm, and I wanted to do my work there. I can't say I was specially courteous, but I answered his questions.

"And I pay well," I concluded.

"How much?"

"Twenty-five shillings for each ancient working on your farm you point out to me and let me investigate. And we have our camp, our boys, our provisions. We don't need a thing. We won't disturb anybody. All we will want is a place for camping, close to fresh water, if possible. And to know where we can get some wood."

"Two shillings a day," decided Jan. "And one shilling for each load of wood Peter, my nigger, will bring you."

He surely was a hospitable soul, that one!

"All right," I agreed. "I will come with my men tomorrow, then."

"Wait a minute," he said. "When did you arrive here?"

"Why," I said, only half-lying, "I followed the doctor's car."

Under his bushy eyebrows, Big Jan's eyes suspiciously scanned his wife, who was still standing pale and tense in her corner. They flashed toward the doctor, who was bending down to knock the ashes out of his huge pipe, in which he had craftily put a small pinch of tobacco before Jan's ar-

rival. Then, quickly, once more they surveyed the stubs of my cigarettes, and again they looked at me.

"Tell me," he said with that same bluntness, "are you married?"

That was a bit too much. "Not that it is any damned business of yours," I said, "but I am. And now you know it, you can go to hell. You and your rude questions!"

I thought the man would try to hit me. Instead, he exploded into laughter.

"Oh, ho ho! That is good!"

He slapped his heavy thighs. He bent low and bellowed and roared, until cords stood out all over his neck, and tears streamed from his eyes.

"A man leaves his wife home, to go hunting for old holes in the ground! And he pays real money for it, too. Ja, ja, that's a good one!"

He was *kapot*, he yelled. And we three, around him, were even more *kapot* than he—his wife embarrassed to death, the doctor pale around the eyes and the mouth, I not knowing what to say, whether to take those gusts of laughter as an insult or as a sign of cordiality—though a queer kind.

At that moment an old Negro trotted into the courtyard. He was saying something in a thin, rusty voice and everyone seemed to welcome the interruption of the awkward tension created by Big Jan's bad manners.

As the native advanced with a marked limp toward us, I noticed that the right arm, with which he pointed toward a *kloof* to his right, ended in a stump.

Big Jan sobered up then. As he turned his back to us and took some long, heavy steps toward the native, the doctor motioned with his head. "That's Peter," he said. "Got his

hand shot off and one leg wounded, at Magersfontein. In 1899. During the second Boer War."

Jan De Wit exchanged a few sentences with the Negro. When he came back to us, his face had again assumed that cruel, calculating expression it had had when he arrived.

"Peter has just seen a big black mamba," he said in Afrikaans. "The same, he says, that some days ago killed the horse you were unable to save for me."

He was talking to the doctor. But his eyes were on his wife. There was an undercurrent to his words, a byplay I did not grasp at first.

"One of us must go," he went on, "and kill that snake, as soon as it reaches the road and starts crossing it." Then, with another long glance at his wife, he went on, "Every snake that comes to this farm gets killed, one day or another. What you say, you healer of beasts?"

By then the tension was at such a pitch, the sarcasm of those last words was so heavy, that I wouldn't have blamed the vet if he had jumped at the neck of the man. But, there was Elsa, and he must have loved her even more than I thought. You could see in his desperate eyes he didn't want to touch her husband. But he was blind with fury.

"True," he said slowly. "There are also beasts I cannot heal. But I, too, am able to kill a snake!"

As he turned around and went to his dilapidated car, Big Jan watched him through eyes closed to slits. He made a move as if to follow the younger man, then he stopped. And ignoring me entirely, he turned toward his wife.

"Go inside!" he ordered curtly.

Behind me I heard Peter's shrill voice: "The great mamba is nearing the road. But be careful, Baas! It is . . ."

The car's engine burst into life with a tremendous racket. The rear wheels turned madly, flinging away gravel and dust. The creaking contraption careened away.

Mrs. De Wit was standing rigid, as if in a trance. She seemed not to have heard her husband's command. Her face was sheer white, her beautiful eyes were enormous. But if that brute Jan had hoped to hear her cry out a warning to the man he knew she loved, he was disappointed.

Not a sound came from her. Not while the little car, followed by Peter, swerved around the corner of the stable on two wheels. Not while, reappearing beyond the small building, it zigzagged twice, as if aiming at something we could not see from the stoep. Then we saw a glitter, as if a huge whip had flashed above the doctor's head and down again—and the car disappeared behind a curtain of vegetation.

From there, a strangled cry and the squeak of brakes came to us, followed in rapid succession by a sharp concussion and the crackling sound of a tree snapped by some terrific impact.

With no sound but a pitiful little moan, Mrs. De Wit crumpled to the ground in a dead faint. Before I could reach her, Big Jan had stepped forward, and gathered her up in his arms.

"This is *my* wife," he barked at me savagely. "Go help the beast-healer, if you want to."

I am not absolutely sure of it, but I could almost swear that while I rushed around the corner of the stable, a bellow of laughter resounded from the house behind me. Whatever the sound was, it gave me the creeps. Even before I could catch up with the howling Peter, still trotting ahead of me, I felt a strong sense of nausea.

Then I saw the car.

Its front part was pancaked, its top shattered. The doctor was slumped on the seat, his head caught between the wheel and the fallen part of the broken tree. The great black mamba, its tail almost severed, was trying to wriggle away from the open ground, to reach the protection of the underbrush. Then I fully understood what had happened in those few tragic seconds. And only by a desperate effort I avoided being actually sick.

The twelve-foot mamba could be attempting to escape for one reason only—because it had already emptied the contents of its venom glands and was therefore weaponless, afraid now of a human being, even a disabled one like Peter.

Old Peter knew it better than I, of course. He was approaching the writhing snake with a large stone in his only hand. He was aiming at the ugly, flat head from which the malignant-looking forked tongue was flickering out. He flung the stone at the head. Then he hammered at it with another stone. Again and again, until the whole evil head was crushed to a nasty pulp. Still, the dead serpent's huge body twisted and lashed, and I had to jump aside not to be whipped by its half-detached tail.

Then I was near Dr. Van Overbeek. A glance—and I knew there was nothing I could do for the poor devil. In his blind fury, he had run over the black mamba to kill it, but the snake had been too quick for him. Swift as lightning, it had reared up and struck him in the neck—once, for a fraction of a second only. But in that instant, the mamba's fangs had probably ejected enough poison to kill six men.

Under the shock of this realization, the doctor had been unable to steer the car free of the tree. Luckily for him, the top part of the trunk had knocked his head with such a vio-

lence that it had killed him on the spot. At least, he had been saved hours of horrible agony, an agony to which no one there could have brought the slightest relief.

The only thing I could do under the circumstances was to reach the D.C. as soon as possible and to report the death.

I told old Peter to keep guard of the body until the D.C.'s arrival. I had to threaten him with the sternest punishments before I obtained his promise that he would not touch anything in the meantime. Especially, that he would not, until properly authorized, burn the remains of the snake—a thing he insisted he should do at once, lest the mamba's mate pick up its trail and follow it to where it ended.

Then I went back to the house to get my car. I was glad that no one was around and that I didn't have to see that maniacal brute again, or his poor wife.

As I drove the forty-two miles to the D.C.'s post, I went over in my mind the events of that ghastly afternoon. And I came to the conclusion that, though De Wit—the practical joker—had actually driven to his death the man of whom he was so madly jealous, nothing could be pinned on him. And that nothing could be done to save his wife from his clutches, either.

On the first point I was right, but on the second I was to be proved a hundred per cent wrong. Sometimes fate has up its sleeve some queer tricks of its own. And, as I shall relate later, in this case it was reserving the queerest of them all for Big Jan—a macabre practical joke for the most hateful practical joker I have ever known.

22.

Snake Lore

THE TRAGIC end of Dr. Van Overbeek, happening as it did so unexpectedly and almost under my eyes, was what started me hating and dreading snakes with such fervent thoroughness. It also had several other effects upon my expedition and myself.

One was that I didn't hesitate a minute in canceling the work I had planned to do in that vicinity. The moment the inquest was over—a lot of red tape lasting a couple of days, but during which the gallant D.C. saw to it that no one questioned or disturbed in any manner the unhappy Mrs. De Wit—I decided to proceed, instead, with my itinerary across Southern Rhodesia and the westernmost section of Portuguese East Africa, into the adjacent province of Mozambique.

Another was that wherever I was, I took advantage of every occasion to coax the oldest natives, as well as doctors, officials, farmers and missionaries who had lived long in the country, into telling me everything they knew about snakes.

My interest was spurred by more than one practical reason. For I had come to the conclusion that simply to ignore snakes only because one disliked them was courting death. For instance, I reasoned, if Dr. Van Overbeek, instead of limiting his knowledge of snakes to what he had learned at the Onderste Poort's College of Veterinary Science—from

which, according to the coroner, he had graduated a couple of years before—had tried to find out more about black mambas from the natives of his district, very probably he wouldn't have died.

Little as I had known about snakes up till then, I myself would never have attempted to run over that twelve-foot devil. Unless perhaps, its head had been very close to the ground and I had been more than sure that my wheel was not going to miss it. That, I was sure had not been the case with the doctor. Though from the stoep I had not a clear view, I could visualize well enough what the mamba had done.

Caught in the middle of the road by the arrival of the car, the black mamba had known one thing only—that an enemy was almost upon it. Promptly reacting according to its instincts, relying upon its extraordinary swiftness of movement and the potency of its venom, it had not attempted flight, but had coiled upward, prepared to attack. Its head was poised, probably, some three feet from the ground. Behind and below each of its eyes, its venom glands were ready to release instantly their lethal nerve poison through its front fangs, which are grooved like a hypodermic needle.

The mamba's stony, unclosable eyes, protected by the transparent, horny disk which in snakes takes the place of movable eyelids, looked for the oncomer's most vulnerable spot. It held itself tense.

The moment the car touched its body, the black mamba sprang. Its fangs struck unerringly. Its venom glands, a perverse modification of the ordinary salivary glands of other vertebrate animals, instantly discharged their load of death.

Had the doctor realized the danger in time and stopped clear of the snake, he could have killed it with the shotgun he

had in his car. Had he not been so blinded with fury, had he known mambas better, he could have still proved his courage to the girl of his heart by fighting the snake with a stick or a stone. Perhaps he might almost have stood a better chance attacking it with his bare hands.

As far as I was concerned, after that dramatic lesson I was determined to avoid such suicidal mistakes, and to learn all I could concerning the habits and character of snakes, as well as about the way of treating their bites.

At that time, antivenom serums were not yet easily obtainable. Nor had the vacuum pumps for extracting venom from a bite yet been invented—pumps such as those the U.S. Army Medical Corps includes today in all snakebite kits supplied to troops. Then, when a bite happened to be one in which the fangs injected their poison directly in a vein or artery, it was recognized that no white man's remedy could save the victim. And the same was true of a bite in the head or neck. For the only hope was in instantly applying tight ligatures between the wound and the heart so as not to allow the venom to reach the latter.

In other parts of the body, a bite might not be fatal, if . . . But the "if's" were many.

If proper care was taken immediately. *If* some of the poison had been absorbed by the clothing pierced by the fangs. *If* most of the balance was at once sucked out of the wound. *If* the two punctures were laid open with a knife, in the direction of the muscles. *If* abundant bleeding was caused in time. *If* crystals of permanganate of potash were handy, and were promptly rubbed deeply in the cuts. *If* the ligatures were kept on no longer than half an hour, then loosened for a moment every few minutes . . .

These were some of the "if's" which stood between a painful recovery and the worst of deaths.

But, according to medical experience, despite all such precautions, people had died *even when bitten by absolutely harmless snakes*. What had killed them was not the effect of the venom, but the nervous shock suffered in believing they had been bitten by a poisonous snake.

A mistake of this kind is not as silly as it sounds. There are many varieties of snakes, and to most people they all look much alike and all are equally repulsive. In a tight spot, only an expert can be depended upon to have the self-control, the coolness of mind and the knowledge to classify a snake correctly and to decide how dangerous it is likely to be.

In that part of Africa alone there are an even one hundred varieties of snakes, which scientists have grouped into five families. It may be that of two snakes belonging to the same family—and therefore similar in appearance—one could not harm even the smallest creature if it tried to; the other with one flickering motion could dispatch the largest bull, let alone a man.

Families 1 and 2 (*Typhlopidae* and *Glauconidae*) account for sixteen varieties of small burrowing reptiles, all harmless, including a blunt-ended one from which is derived the widespread belief in the existence of a two-headed snake.

Family 3 is represented by two varieties of *Boidae*, the formidable pythons about which I will have more to say later on.

Families 4 (*Colubridae*) and 5 (*Viperidae*) are the ones of special interest in the matter under discussion, particularly the *Colubridae*, which are divided into three subfamilies, according to the kind of teeth they have.

In the twenty-six varieties of the first subfamily, the teeth are not hollow. These snakes, therefore, are harmless, and don't let your nerves stampede you into believing differently. For they often reach six feet in length, and to encounter one at close quarters is not a pleasant experience, even if you realize that some of them are more friend than enemy to man, especially as expert rat catchers. Others do nothing worse than steal eggs of any kind, including the egg of the ostrich. One variety can swallow an ostrich egg whole, though it is many times as large around as the snake's body.

The twenty-six varieties of the second subfamily have fangs, that is, tubular teeth, and through the hollow in these fangs the contents of the venom glands can be discharged. These glands are enveloped by strong muscles that squeeze the poison into the fangs the moment the snake opens its mouth to strike.

The fangs, however, are about halfway down the jaw, and this makes it difficult for these snakes to bite a human being. Hence came their reputation of being harmless, and the general laughing-off, as superstition, of the native's belief that they were dangerous. But a few years ago it was definitely established that they ejected a poison as lethal as that of the cobra.

About the fifteen varieties of the third subfamily there has never been any doubt. These are the front-fanged born murderers, the most vicious, swift and deadly of them all. They include the huge, pugnacious black and green mambas; the innocent-looking sea snakes, often mistaken for eels, but terribly poisonous; the dreadful cobras; and the treacherous ringhals.

The latter, also called spitting snakes, are among the fierc-

est of the group. Often they attack without the slightest provocation. When chased, I have seen them turn upon the pursuers; or they will feign death, while waiting for the most favorable moment to spray their poison directly at the eyes of their foe. They can do this with accurate aim from a distance of several feet, and often from ambush, catching their victim unaware, and nine times out of ten blinding it.

As for the cobra, many people, including the writers of textbooks and encyclopedias, seem to think that it is limited to Asia. That is a fallacy—and one that I have personal reasons to resent.

True, the giant cobra, which reaches fourteen feet or more in length and which is also called the "spectacled snake" because of the odd pattern of different-colored scales on the back of its head, like the caricature of a bespectacled human face, exists only in Siam, Burma, Malay and India.

But there are also four different varieties and twelve distinct colorations of African cobra. These snakes, though seldom more than seven feet long, are no less deadly than their Asiatic cousins. Like the latter, they can extend the erectile head outward, more than doubling the width, and further increasing the fearfulness of their appearance. This feat the cobra accomplishes, when aroused, by a spasmodic contraction of the muscles controlling a certain number of its ribs. For the ribs near the head are independently movable, and the skin over them is especially elastic and loose, so that the ribs can be elevated or depressed at will.

To complete the one hundred varieties, there are the fifteen of Family 5. Its Latin name of *Viperidae* suggests some of its most dangerous members, the burrowing vipers which look so much like inoffensive *Typhlopidae* of the first family,

but are exceedingly poisonous. The most spectacular African representative of this family (whose American counterparts are the copperhead, moccasin snake and rattlesnake) is the puff adder, to which recent statistics attribute 95 per cent of all deaths of men and animals from snake bite.

Thick of body, with a stumpy short tail, a flattened, triangular, blunt head made even more repulsive by stony eyes, the puff adder seldom is longer than five feet. It has no fear, and in its search for food it does not hesitate to invade stables, barns, huts or even the best-built modern dwellings. If an animal or a human being resents its intrusion, or lies asleep in its path, the puff adder strikes. As in other members of its clan of killers, the upper jaw can snap open at a right angle, like the spring-lid of a box. In that upper jaw there are no solid teeth—only two fangs, ready to deal a murderous double stab. Its concentrated poison is so virulent that it can kill even the largest animal in less than an hour. Only a drop of it, smeared on the point of a Bushman's arrow, is sufficient to finish fairly large game.

In spite of the destruction of snakes in Africa by natives and white men alike, their powers of reproduction are so extraordinary that the veldt and jungle continue to teem with them. Yet only the python is known to incubate its eggs. Other snakes which lay eggs, usually with a white leathery shell, leave to the sun the care of hatching them. Others bring forth both eggs and young at the same time. Or they deposit in the most unexpected places great numbers of young ones already developed and prepared to bite their way through life.

I found this out for myself one time in Broken Hill, Northern Rhodesia. That night, I casually extended my hand

to get from under my camp bed a pair of shoes which had remained for some time unused, on the floor of my tent. The shoes seemed to have grown heavy, and a vague forewarning jerked me out of my casualness. Instead of pulling at the shoes, I switched on my flashlight and bent on my knees to reconnoiter the situation. And there, before my startled eyes, a whole bunch of diminutive cobras popped up, hissing madly, necks coiled to strike, miniature heads extended.

After killing them all, we counted them. The little cobras were twenty-two. It was not pleasant to think what twenty-two pairs of cobra fangs, discharging into your blood stream the contents of twenty-two pairs of venom glands, could do to you!

The Cobra Strikes Twice

THE MEMORY of Elsa De Wit obsessed me for a long time. It was not that I felt any personal interest in her, not even a mild case of the infatuation such as seemed to have taken possession of the D.C. of Marandellas. But I couldn't get out of my mind those nightmarish few hours at the farm, and the thought of what her life, already so miserable then, must have become after the death of the young man to whom she had given her love, or in whom, at least, she had seen the only ray of light and hope.

When, at Mavul Masangeni, the last road of my itinerary ended and I had to continue on foot with my guide, Xipooso, and some porters, I began to think more and more often about other things and persons than those immediately around me. And Elsa, Big Jan, old Peter, and the heart-breaking drama which was going on in that little farm hundreds of miles away were much in my thoughts.

During those endless days of monotonous walking along pestilential swamps, across sun-baked deserts and empty plains broken only by an occasional baobab, my mind often detached itself from the tediousness of the march and the surroundings. It was in such a state of mental detachment that one day I did a very foolish thing, one I had never done before—and have never done since, you can be sure.

The only pair of boots I had taken with me were still soaked with the rain of the previous afternoon, stinking with the pestiferous mud of a swamp into which we had to wade up to our waist. The day, judging by the incredible temperature of that early morning, was going to be a prize scorcher. And so, in my state of being only half aware of my surroundings, I forgot all proper caution and put on a pair of sneakers.

The difference they made in walking comfort was enormous, and without thinking twice, I went on, day after day, wearing those low canvas shoes.

A week or so later, we entered a plain which was covered by ten-foot-high elephant grass. Stupefied by the midday sun, I was trudging behind Xipooso like a somnambulist, along the narrow path he was opening through the grass. At a distance, the porters followed. And the unending "swish-swish" that the loads on their head evoked from the grass was enough to put anyone to sleep, even if not as deadly tired and bored as I was.

Suddenly, however, I was fully awakened—and leaping backward.

My right foot had trodden upon something soft, slimy, repellent. And I had felt a sharp impact and a painful prick, first on my right ankle, then on the left.

I bent to look at my legs, and faced a huge cobra. For an infinitesimal instant I remained as if hypnotized, watching its malignant head, flanked by the erected extensions of its hood, sway slightly from side to side. Then the whole horror of my extremity dawned upon me.

The nervous shock was such that I had to make a superhuman effort to let out a shout, to move backward.

Things began to happen fast. Behind me, porters dropped

their loads and rushed to my help. Xipooso was already there, his spear poised. It flashed, and the cobra was nailed to the ground in the contortions of death.

"The medicine chest," I was barely able to say.

Xipooso did not waste a second. He ordered some of the boys to clear a wide space around us, others to gather all the dry wood they could find. He made me lie down, and took hold of my right ankle. Quickly but thoroughly, he sucked the two pinlike pricks and spat, again and again. While he was repeating the operation on the left ankle, I sat up and managed to pull out the belt of my blouse and the one which held my shorts. I bound one around each leg as tight as I could, just above the knee.

That was about all I was able to do. Then a boy came with the first-aid kit—and at the sight of it I thought my heart had stopped. Evidently a porter had dropped the box in the water some days before, and had said nothing, for fear of being reprimanded. Now the box contained only a sticky, acrid-smelling mess of broken phials, matted oiled-paper envelopes and sodden bandages. The permanganate of potash had dissolved in the mixture. My hope had dissolved with it.

I tried to keep what little control I still had on my nerves. "I had a *dawa*," I said to Xipooso, "a medicine that might have saved me. Now—it is gone."

"Close your eyes, *Musungu*," he said gravely. "Close your head to fears. And close your heart to pains."

The eyes were easy to close, as I lay down again. My head and heart were another matter. I knew too much about snakes, now. Once a witchdoctor, whose specialty was handling snakes and gathering their venom, had shown me a cobra, which he calmly held just behind the head between thumb and fore-

finger. The cobra had bitten a rat twice, and after that, the witchdoctor explained, the snake would be almost harmless for twenty-four hours, the time for the venom glands to refill completely. But the rat had died in a few seconds. And, now, *I was the twice-bitten rat!*

My eyes were still closed, but in them passed a frantic succession of lights and shadows. My chest was heaving convulsively. My heart throbbed as if trying to break loose. My brain was getting blurred, as if smothered by a heavy, all-pervading fog. I did not know if the poison was beginning to take effect, or if what I felt was merely the effect of nervous shock.

Desperately, I tried to hold on to some sane thought. "*They are going to save me,*" I made an effort to repeat. Then I smelled smoke. "*They are burning the cobra,*" I said to myself. "For it's true that its mate otherwise would come too, no doubt about it. But—*they are going to save me.*"

Minutes, hours, eternities went by—there were times when I was endeavoring to reason, others when I was floating into nothingness.

But the fire was being used for another purpose. A searing flash of appalling pain jerked me back to consciousness. Determined hands firmly pinned down my legs and arms and shoulders. But I lifted my head and for an instant I could see what they were doing. Rapidly, Xipooso was plunging a thin, red-hot piece of iron into each print left by each fang. One, two, in the left leg. One, two, in the right leg. Streamlets of blackish blood poured out. The sickening stench of burning flesh assailed my nostrils. A spasmodic contraction of all my muscles seized me, while another red-hot piece of iron was passed to Xipooso and he plunged it in my flesh, all around

the bites, again and again. Then—mercifully—oblivion for me.

A little more than a year later, I was back in Marandellas. The D.C. had heard from the natives what had happened to me. But he wanted me to tell him the whole story again, with all details. While I talked I showed him one by one the scars left on my legs, the tiny ones where the fangs had penetrated, the large ones with which the inexorable Xipooso had marked forever both my legs.

"It was hell," I said. "But, when any white doctor would have given me up, he saved me. And the wonderful care he and the other men gave me afterwards! Throughout days and nights of raging fever and fits of delirium. Walking scores of miles to obtain fresh goat milk and good water, spending hours forcing nourishment, drop by drop, through my locked teeth. Treating the charred flesh of my legs with some miraculous mixture of medicinal herbs of their own. Two months after," I concluded, "except for these scars, I wouldn't have known it had happened to me."

"Marvelous," the D.C. said. "Marvelous! I'll make a report to the Governor, see that Xipooso gets the highest decoration for natives. It's the least we can do!" Then, after a moment's hesitation, he smiled. "You know," he said, "I have something to tell, too. I've gone through some hell myself. Also because of a snake."

It took him some hems and haws to get started on his story. But the moment he mentioned the De Wit farm, I was all ears. And, once started, his story fascinated me thoroughly.

Since Dr. Van Overbeek's death, things had been going from bad to worse with the De Wits. The D.C. took advan-

tage of every official excuse to go to the farm, hoping against hope that one day he might find a way to be of assistance to Elsa or to instill some decency into Big Jan.

One night, he was asked to remain for dinner. He didn't want to stay, both because he was suspicious of this unusual invitation and because the idea of sitting and eating while Elsa served them, as is the Boer custom, irked him, and made him thoroughly uncomfortable.

But Big Jan insisted so persistently, and Elsa's eyes implored so pathetically, that he finally had to accept.

The meal finished, Big Jan pushed back his plate, belched with pleasure and banged his fist on the table.

"Fetch me my pipe, Elsa," he ordered. "From the front room. On the table."

"Now you will see one of my practical jokes at work," he said to the D.C. when Elsa had gone out. "It's going to cure her of the memory of the beast-healer. A big black mamba I've killed this morning. I've fixed it on the sofa in the front room, so it looks alive . . ."

The D.C. was on his feet even before the high wild cry and the dull sound of a falling body reached them. But Big Jan was nearer the door. The D.C. pushed at his heels.

Elsa lay on the floor, face down. And on the sofa, coiled beside the dead mate, a black mamba hissed.

Big Jan was a cruel man of quick, terrible rages. But he was fearless and, in his own way, he had loved Elsa more than anything in the world. A heavy walking stick lay on the table near him. He picked it up and lunged at the snake. His foot caught on a chair overturned by Elsa's fall. He stumbled, cursed and fell forward, his head hitting the sofa. Instantly, the black mamba struck at him, in the neck.

Frozen with horror, the D.C. saw Jan's body heave, then collapse, and he knew that the double shock had finished the big Boer.

As the living mamba, now weaponless and afraid, recoiled from its dead mate and glided through the open door onto the stoep, the D.C. was again able to move. He rushed to Elsa, picked her up and started for the car. "Serum"—that was all he was able to think of—"serum—serum."

At the door he stopped abruptly. In the twilight he saw that her great blue eyes had opened, dilated with fear.

"Elsa! Elsa!" he cried. "Where did the mamba bite you? Tell me. Quickly!"

"They did not touch me." She shuddered in his arms. "I must have fainted when—when, across the room, I saw them!"

The D.C. stopped. His story left me speechless.

"And she really was all right?" I finally asked.

"She was," said the D.C. "And she is. Down in Cape Town with her family. To recover from the shock—and to forget."

"I'm so glad," I said. "And . . ."

"Yes," beamed the D.C. "We're going to get married there. Next month."

"Congratulations!" I said, shaking his hand. "That's grand. But I still hate and dread snakes."

"So do I," he said. "As a matter of fact, I have asked to be sent to Durban. To live again in a city. Where, I hope, my wife will never again see snakes—the murderous devils!"

The Woman and the Python

THERE IS another side to the question of the venomous African snakes. Potentially, of course, those snakes are never anything but killers. But there are instances when their fearful appearance and the terror they generally inspire are used in order to obtain exactly the opposite effect—that is, to help cure some of mankind's most difficult physical and mental ills.

To observe one of these rare occasions, one must travel all the way to a kraal hidden in the Xosa Mountains of northern Natal, which not half a dozen whites, I suppose, have ever visited. But to the inhabitants of the country that kraal is a sort of Mecca, to which almost everyone, from the mighty paramount chief down to the most insignificant youth, hopelessly in love, has made at least one pilgrimage at some time or other.

The biggest of the thirty-odd huts which compose the village—the one which in most villages is usually reserved to the *pater familias*—sports on its rounded exterior an enormous leopard hide. That skin is the "shingle" of the witchdoctor who lives in the hut and who, like every other regular inhabitant of the kraal, must by tradition be a female—and a virgin. She is Pythoness Twadekili, probably one of the most extraordinary persons I have met in all my world travels, and

certainly the wisest, most respected and revered person in the whole land of the Xosa Kaffirs.

Every feature of Pythoness Twadekili's life, habits and accomplishments is equally startling from the point of view of witchcraft as well as for its close connection with the lore of snakes.

Her bed rests upon a grave. She eats little, only vegetables and fruits, since meats and fowls must be all reserved for her companion and life-sharer. She hasn't had a husband, and never will have one. For her mind must be entirely devoted to her profession, and her perceptions would be blunted by carnal passions, the process of her intelligence slowed and hampered by the burden of a family. Her mental eyes are said to see with disconcerting clarity through the present—regardless of boundaries of space and despite all subterfuges or reservations of mind. Not only that, but every Xosa Kaffir firmly believes that they can also peer deep into the past, and pierce far ahead into a person's future.

The fact is that, after having observed and carefully studied her work for years, I have come to the conclusion that, primitive and unassuming as Pythoness Twadekili is, there seem to be practically no secrets of love and hate, of pregnancy and childbirth, of the most involved problems and the gravest diseases, that have been withheld from her.

Twadekili's existence offers other, even more striking aspects. For she shares the privacy of her big hut with the very serpent from which she derives her professional name—a python. It is a twenty-foot creature that any moment could throw around her coil upon coil of its repugnantly cold, scaly, heavy body. And with one contraction of its fearful muscles, it could crush her bones and swallow her whole, beginning

at the head, of course, as pythons usually do in disposing of their victims.

Instead, this giant specimen of Natal rock snake—to use the common name of the South African variety of boa constrictor—is Twadekili's daily and nightly companion, her most trusted confidant, the only counselor she consults and whose help she demands whenever she is faced by a particularly difficult case.

This enormous python, the sight of which alone would provoke a quiver of fear in the bravest man, was captured years ago by Twadekili herself, when she was still a young girl. And she caught the monster without any assistance of trap or snare or weapon, and not even with the use of her hands, but by magic means. That this could be done, I was unable to believe until I happened to see for myself a repetition of the same amazing performance, accomplished by Twadekili's only disciple. It was a feat which left no place for doubt, though I have ever since tried to analyze it, but have never succeeded in finding a wholly satisfactory explanation.

This python of hers, Twadekili is positive, will live as long as she does, and die at the same time she exhales her last breath. Both corpses, then, will be buried under the floor of the hut of Ramini, Twadekili's chosen disciple and appointed successor, just as Twadekili's old teacher and the latter's python were buried at their simultaneous death in the center of Twadekili's hut, exactly in the place which from that day on has been covered by the present Pythoness' sleeping mat. For, the Xosa Kaffirs say, it is decreed that the spirit of one Pythoness and of her python should remain comfortingly near her successor, to inspire her in the gravest decisions.

This has been scrupulously carried out for centuries un-

told, thus keeping unbroken the chain of accumulated wisdom and ever-increasing knowledge which began in the remote past. The custom is probably connected with the dim ages when the Pythonesses of ancient Crete, the counterparts of the Twadekili of today, were influencing with their momentous oracles the events of the Minoan civilizations at its highest, thousands of miles to the north, and some four thousand years ago!

What I have already said and what I am about to relate about Pythoness Twadekili, and the details of the unforgettable ceremony which culminated the life-long education of Ramini, sole spiritual daughter of Twadekili, owe nothing to hearsay or imagination. They are only part of the actual facts which I had the opportunity of gathering, and which I, together with the widely known scientists on my staff, have carefully investigated and checked during three expeditions to northern Natal.

To make the results of our researches more clear and understandable, however, I should first mention some interesting facts about Twadekili's python partner.

If you should examine a python, you would notice the rudimentary legs represented by a spurlike development on each side of the base of the tail. These are only a reminder of the far-off time when snakes had legs as some other reptiles still have. Today the serpent, without any actual organ of locomotion, glides with stealthy, swift, silent motion along the ground and over any obstacle. The secret lies in the strangely joined, abnormally mobile ribs which, by a single rotating head, articulate in pairs with their respective vertebrae, the segments of the spinal column whose number, in the larger specimens, is well above four hundred. At the other end, each

pair of ribs is in muscular connection with the slightly overlapping scales which cover the undersurface of the snake's body. The rib muscles contract in rhythmic sequence, and the free overlapping edges of the scales are raised in continuous succession. They strike the ground with the same regular motion as that of the paddle wheel of a river steamer, and thus they push the body forward.

As it moves, the python feels its way with continuous lightning flickerings of its slender tongue, which terminates in two long, pinlike points, and which the snake, when swallowing its prey, can keep out of the way by retracting it entirely into a sheath.

Its flattened head, wider than the body and having no external ear-openings, darts ahead toward the quarry. Its glistening eyes, protected by the horny transparent disks already mentioned, which are continuous with the skin and are periodically shed with the rest of it, are rendered even more mesmerizing by the fixity resulting from the complete absence of movable eyelids.

If necessary, the python's prehensile tail enters into action too, striking the victim which the diabolical stare of those ophidian eyes has already half hypnotized into defenselessness. Be it an animal or a human being, before the prey can do much against the attacker, it is locked by coil after coil of that repulsive mass. As soon as the hold is secure enough, all the muscles of the serpent contract at one time—and the victim is strangled, its bones are smashed, and life is squeezed out.

Then comes the most horrible part of the whole nightmarish performance. The victim may be a mere rodent, a young deer, a small antelope; or it may be something as large

as a horse or a cow—or it may be a human being. In any case, the serpent will stretch its malignant head wide enough to swallow its prey whole.

You cannot believe your own eyes, even while you are watching it happen. Not even if you have dissected a python's head and seen for yourself how all the bones connected with the jaws are loosely held together by elastic ligaments, and how the lower jaw is composed by two segments of bone joined by stretchable bonds.

You watch the horrible sight—and you feel that it cannot be true. Not even if you know that the python's slender, sharply pointed teeth—two rows of them in the upper jaw, one in the lower—are curved backward in such a way that no animal could have a chance of retreating, once seized by those hooklike teeth, and that the python itself would be unable to let go its huge prey even if it wanted to.

You are unbearably sickened by such a spectacle—by the horrible sounds and motions, by the copious discharge of saliva which the snake is pouring over the spoil to facilitate that monstrous swallowing process.

To what excess the inexorable operation can go, I realized only when, hidden in an outcrop of rocks not far from Pythoness Twadekili's kraal, I happened to see two medium-size pythons get hold of the same gazelle.

The place, weird, dark, silent, was never frequented by human beings, and seldom visited by animals. It was a disorderly convulsion of huge blocks of granite and contorted trees, whose twisted branches formed a solid canopy of green. Its Xosa name meant "The Lair of Serpents." I never approached the place without a weapon in my hand, all my senses on the alert. I wouldn't have gone near it at night, not

for a fortune; but in the daytime, taking all proper precautions, I went more than once to hide near its edges, because from there I could watch unobserved what was happening all around Twadekili's hut.

One such time a pitiful "baa," instantly followed by the sound of crushing bones, prompted me to some lively searching of the immediate surroundings, and I discovered a python just beginning to swallow the head of a barely dead gazelle. Another python, only slightly smaller, was already appearing out of a fissure from the opposite direction and quickly advanced toward the hindquarters of the gazelle. Then, contrary to all I had learned about the python's way of dealing with its prey, the second serpent stretched its mouth and began to gulp in the animal's limp legs.

It was appalling to watch—those two hideous creatures attempting to gorge themselves with that same gazelle, one at either extremity. It seemed to throw a spell upon me; I was controlled by a kind of morbid curiosity, and I couldn't help staying and staring.

Inch by inch the portion between those two outstretched mouths diminished. Gulp by gulp, the two serpent heads were approaching. What would happen when they came together? Would one of the two give up and be able to let go? Or would they both make a simultaneous effort to tear the prey asunder and get away, each with the half it had already engulfed.

What happened was even worse. When the two heads came in contact, the first python, being bigger and stronger, simply widened its mouth even more. It gulped with more spasmodic effort and, bit by bit, it began to ingurgitate the other python, alive, together with the rest of the gazelle already in the latter's body.

The gulping went on and on. At last there remained only one python on the scene, its body horribly swollen. It began slowly to creep toward a hole in the rocks, the entrance to a cave where it would remain in sluggish torpor for weeks, or perhaps for months. Until its gargantuan, half-cannibalistic meal would be entirely assimilated, and new hunger would awaken to active life its body, finally returned again to normal proportions.

Naturally, the habits of snakes are better known to the common Kaffir than to any of our most specialized scientists. But I believe that the knowledge of a Pythoness like Twadekili goes far beyond that. Being, as she is, the depository of the knowledge and the experience accumulated through the ages by her predecessors, and handed on from one to another; being destined from her birth to undertake and follow her unique profession and to share all her adult life with a python, she must know much that is hidden from all others.

She must know, of course, how long her companion can exist from one meal to the next. She must also know exactly how much to feed the serpent. And she must know, I am sure, how to doctor its food, to keep it permanently in an unaggressive state, but at the same time, in a state of useful wakefulness and complete obedience.

Friendly as we became during the latter part of our acquaintance, and many as were the secret ceremonies and cures which Twadekili allowed me to witness, never did she answer a precise question on this subject. My eyes, however, were open and alertly curious. And I couldn't help but notice that the tender kids and young goats which she chose from the "fees" paid to her by her "patients" and which were kept in the special enclosure called "The Python's Larder," were fed

exclusively with milk which had been previously handled by Ramini, her closest assistant; or with a limited number of varieties of herbs, all highly aromatic and for the most part unknown to me, which specially trained girl servants took great pains and much time to gather all over the countryside.

Both by the quantity and the quality of food, and by the carefully calculated dose of it, Twadekili succeeded in keeping her python in a sort of docile semi-torpor. Its health remained perfect, its size increased, its hunger was always satisfied enough to restrain it from becoming dangerous, yet never completely gratified, so as to keep it ready for action whenever needed.

While I am bent upon debunking all I honestly can of the *mise en scène* that, in a way, might be considered as Pythoness Twadekili's crude version of our doctors' mysterious instruments and impressive Latin words, I wish to make clear another point about which I am quite positive. That is, that had her python tried to get out of her control, she would have been able to immobilize it instantly. Not by recourse to any of the supernatural means in which her patients seemed to believe implicitly, but simply by applying the pressure of two fingers to a certain place just behind the head of the snake.

Again, this is an assertion I am unable to corroborate with anything I have actually seen the Pythoness do, or, much less, with a photograph. For only twice did I enter the dimness of her hut. And both times I was too frozen by the close proximity of that monster of a python to think of using my camera and a flash of magnesium, which might have risked setting fire to the whole place, or irritating the serpent into some sudden action.

But I have taken other photographs to prove this point—these of an old Xosa Kaffir of the Port Elizabeth snake garden whom I've often seen apply that kind of a pressure on pythons, any one of which could have crushed him in a minute. And though I never was able to discover how the trick was actually worked, he told me himself that he had learned it in his youth from Twadekili. At any rate, the moment he touched those enormous pythons in this way, all aggressiveness went out of them for several minutes. During that time, the frail old man draped them all over him, as many as his body could support, and he played with them as if they had suddenly been changed into harmless pets.

But to return to Twadekili. A snake has been the emblem of the science of medicine since time immemorial. It was so when Aesculapius was worshiped as the god of healing. And it is so today when we see a stylized snake as the emblem on a doctor's car plate, or on the uniform of the Medical Corps. What seems amazing to me is that the Xosa Pythoness, like her distant predecessor of ancient Greece and like ourselves, should use the same symbol—though she used it alive.

As for the gigantic size of Twadekili's python—consider the mentality with which the Xosa Pythoness has to deal. Her patients are among the most superstitious natives of all Africa. Snakes are not only a permanent danger to them, their wives, their children, their cattle, but also the most repulsive of all creatures, the ones which seem most to incarnate evil. They consider with even greater awe the lone medicine woman who shares her living quarters with such a creature; who, far from being frightened by it, possesses such powers as to make it her willing, helpful confederate. That awe she fully needs, and also her patients' utmost confidence, their blindest faith.

Only so can she achieve her cures, save desperate cases, break down the conscious and unconscious mental barriers of clients who ask her to see through time and space and the human heart.

Twadekili's cohabitation with the monster serpent has undeniably dramatic aspects. It is understandable that she exploits them and capitalizes on them. If an obstinate case cannot be disposed of otherwise, she takes the patient into the mystery of her hut. Once there, brought face to face with the python, what man or woman would not forget for a moment about ailments, and concentrate his or her mind solely on the words of the Pythoness? Who could resist becoming half hypnotized, more receptive to suggestion, to medicines or to whatever other influence the Pythoness thinks necessary to bring to bear?

Perhaps Twadekili, who despite all her wisdom remains a Kaffir woman and therefore is deeply superstitious by nature, has come to believe—as she has been trained all her youth to do—that her python really is the depository of the wisdom of ages. Actually, that wisdom which cannot be doubted and which I have many times seen at work, is in her instead, whether she knows it or not. And so, in the end, the critical mind can find nothing portentous in her living in the same hut with a twenty-foot python, which she probably restrains, dominates and directs through many more hereditary secrets than the few I have been able to reason out for myself.

There still remains a big "but"—the way in which a Pythoness first acquires the reptile. That is something which I had the unique privilege of witnessing, and something which left such a profound impression on me that even today, whenever I think of that night in the Xosa country, I still feel a chill run down my spine!

"The Yellow Box of Smoke"

TWADEKILI LIVED in an isolated kraal about a quarter of a mile below the rocky outcrop called "The Lair of Serpents." Men and women of every age and position came to her from all parts of northern Natal in search of health and peace. Among them there were invalids that no other witch-doctor had been able to heal. Some were souls in pain who sought a sure forecast of their future, or an explanatory reading of a past whose indistinct remembrances had become an unbearable burden. Others were chiefs worried by complicated problems of government. Still others were married women whose continued sterility was alienating their husbands' affection. And there were virgins or young warriors whose love was not answered.

The blind, the crippled, the unhappy, the uncertain, they all came to the great Pythoness. Many of them were full of faith and trust and awe. All of them seemed to be certain in advance that the ills of their minds or of their bodies would be healed.

And Twadekili received them all in the same way—the mighty chief who brought her his finest cows as compensation for a ten-minute consultation, or the poor mother who could pay nothing but a basket of fruit and had to be main-

tained for a week in one of the huts always ready for guest patients.

Tall, imposing despite her primitive garb, her hair falling about her face in the many little braids that characterize the hairdress of her profession, Twadekili never looked at a patient. As she sat on the mat near the door of her own hut, her almond-shaped, mongoloid eyes would be seemingly fixed on an invisible world. She would invoke Umkulu-Mkulu, the Xosa's supreme god. And the patient, sitting near her, would join in the invocation by lifting toward the skies the forefinger of the right hand.

Then for a while, there would be complete silence. The sickness, the complaint, the request, were never explained or even formulated. Was not the Pythoness able to read the present, the past, the future?

In whatever manner she derived her knowledge, when the Pythoness finally spoke, her words were pregnant with meaning. Sometimes they were tinged with a sort of dry humor of her own. Usually they were grave, dignified. Always they were to the point, though coated in mystic form.

If the case appeared trivial to her, she would open a bag and throw its contents on a mat, as if they were dice. They were little bones, phalanxes of the very leopard whose skin decorated her hut. Again and again she would throw them, study the pattern they made and begin the operation all over.

As I watched from a distance, careful never to interrupt with a sound or a motion, I wondered if she actually was seeking inspiration from those little bones. Or if she was merely using them to help her concentrate her mind on the problem at hand.

At any rate, the counsel she gave at the end was one of

astonishing wisdom. I have heard her talk of future events which later I myself saw happen. Other times her pronouncements were a mixture of clairvoyance, mind reading, magnetism and wisdom all kneaded together by a dose of exceptionally shrewd common sense.

There was the time when a youth called Nomazindo came to consult her. He was a tall warrior from far away, and he arrived with a girl with whom he was evidently in love.

The problem, as the Pythoness stated it without hesitation after throwing the leopard bones a couple of times, was simple enough. From her words I understood that the father of the virgin, being of modest station, required no more than five cows to give her in marriage to Nomazindo, who wanted desperately to take her as his first wife. But Nomazindo had only three cows—and no prospect whatsoever of acquiring, earning or inheriting any others.

I knew that the price was cheap, from our point of view, for I had once bought one cow myself as a present to a small chief, and I had paid only the equivalent of between three and four dollars. But for a Kaffir it was a huge sum. For instance, if I had enrolled Nomazindo on the basis of the pay my boys had asked and were getting, it would have taken him more than a year to save enough to buy two cows.

So the problem was a serious one, and I was curious to see how the Pythoness would solve a situation which appeared as hopeless to me as it did to the two sad-looking young people in love.

The bones were thrown three more times and the patterns they made were studied, and Twadekili spoke again.

"Cows are not born only of cows," she said. "And riches do not come only from inheritance. Nor solely from long,

steady toil," she added, as if knowing that I had been figuring how long Nomazindo would have to work for me. "Three warriors are coming," she went on, "who are empty-handed and tired and sullen. Wait a while. For in their failure is another's gain. And so are the cows that will bring peace to two loving hearts."

With which cryptic remarks and the usual thanks to Umkulu-Mkulu, the Pythoness disappeared, leaving the boy and the girl standing outside, completely bewildered.

As for myself, I felt as bewildered as they looked.

It was not a feat of magic, I was sure, but the episode struck me forcibly. How could the Pythoness foretell with such certainty the return of my boys, and their lack of success? They had been away for days and there was no reason why they should come back just now. I was positive that no sound of drum, no flicker of fire, no language of smoke signals had spoken to the Pythoness. How was it, then, that she could talk so matter-of-factly of something she could not possibly have learned by any visible or audible means?

It was simply another instance of the primitive native's power to "tele-see" events happening well beyond the reach of the human sight, and to "tele-receive" news that other natives, either consciously or not, were mentally transmitting from great distances. These telepathic powers we are accustomed to judge as supernatural—or as nonexistent—only because we cannot explain them. And because we do not know as yet (or perhaps I should say because we no longer know) how to use them to our benefit.

For I have come to believe that they were originally part of the equipment with which Nature endowed man—not one man or one race, but all men, everywhere, regardless of color

of skin and difference of surroundings. Only, during generations upon generations, we have become "civilized," which means, essentially, that we have detached ourselves more and more from Nature and the earth, that we have delegated more and more of our initial powers to our mechanical contraptions and instruments—compass, barometer, radio, telephone, telegraph, television, electronics, and so on.

Up to a point, we have in this way improved and enlarged those powers, because we can use them, by proxy, whenever we want, over enormous distances, and knowing the whole time how the substituted instruments work.

On the other hand, once separated from our mechanical apparatus, we are totally helpless; while the "savage," having held onto his original powers throughout the ages as an indispensable condition for the survival of his race, can call upon them any time he needs, naked and empty-handed as he may be, and unable as he is to explain them, either to you or to himself. He possesses them as strongly as ever because he has remained almost as close to Nature, as much part of the earth, as are animals—the antelope that gallops away from an approaching hurricane hours before it is foreseen by our sharpest instruments; the pigeon and the horse that infallibly find their way home even over unknown country; the dog that howls long before any seismograph begins to burr the announcement of an earthquake; the buzzard that materializes out of the blue sky to fly straight toward the invisible point where some creature has just died.

Just as we see objects and events in the limited field of view of our eyes, binoculars and telescopes; just as, naturally, instinctively, our children learn how to look, how to focus, how to coordinate their physical vision without any special teach-

ing; so the power, or sense, of tele-seeing and of tele-communicating, naturally, instinctively, develops and grows sharper and more exact while the child of the primitive, unspoilt man grows up in his natural surroundings.

Let us assume that all this, in a fumbling, approximate way, is the light under which one should look at these baffling manifestations which are so often encountered among our "living ancestors," as the savages might well be called. Then let us take another step—a gigantic one. From the average man or woman who has simply inherited these powers which we do not know yet how to define with scientific precision, and who uses them when necessary because they represent his only hope of survival, let us jump to the "specialist," the one-out-of-ten-thousand genius—that is, to one of the topnotch witchdoctors, such as Twadekili.

Let us consider how she has been prepared during her entire youth to her job; how she has devoted to it all her adult years; how she has come to represent the sum total of the knowledge and wisdom painstakingly gathered by her unnumbered predecessors.

Her needs are few, simple, easily taken care of. Her mind, free from all our entangled, unending worries, our civic obligations, our social ambitions, our hobbies and pleasures—is completely devoted to the problems of her profession. Her natural intelligence, enriched by an enormous wealth of experience, never absorbed or distracted by an outside factor, is always concentrated on her main, her sole purpose—that of uncovering, reading, healing the ills of the mind, of the soul, of the body.

Consider all this—and you will not find it difficult to believe that a "poor savage" of a woman like Twadekili can

accomplish things that are as incomprehensible to you as it would be to her that you, and even your small child, by switching a knob of your radio, can bring into your room a voice which is speaking at that very moment from the opposite side of the world.

That was the way I felt when, half an hour after the Pythoness had spoken and retired to her hut, my three boys arrived at the kraal. Especially as one had only to look at them to know that they were "empty-handed and tired and sullen."

The beautiful gold cigarette case, a souvenir of a dear person, which for years I had always carried with me, was lost for good, then. I had missed it a week before, at the end of a long cross-country drive in my truck. On arriving at Twadekili's kraal, I had reached for the cigarette case, and found the hip pocket of my shorts empty, yet I remembered having had a smoke that day, just after eating lunch.

At once I inspected the truck thoroughly, and finding nothing, I immediately sent the three Xosa boys who had been with me that day, to go over our whole trail, promising them a generous present if they should find and bring back my "yellow box of smoke," as they called it.

And now here they were back again—and all they had to show was an empty sardine tin, to prove that they had gone back to the place where I had stopped for lunch.

It had never occurred to me to consult the Pythoness about a matter of my own. But now I felt an odd impulse to ask her advice. The words she had said a while before to Nomazindo intrigued me. Why had she concerned herself with the unsuccessful return of my boys? What had she meant by that "in their failure is another's gain"?

The moment I approached Twadekili's hut, out she came. I sat in the customary place of her patients, and she sat on her mat. Without my saying a word, she began to throw the bones.

As my eyes followed her familiar gestures, I felt that my mind was, almost unwillingly, concentrating on the events of the day I had lost the cigarette case. I found myself going over each moment of that day, each sight and action, as if in a determined effort to remember some small, significant detail which escaped my memory.

Apparently, whatever that detail was, it did not escape Twadekili. Her eyes were now no longer lost in some world invisible to me; they were staring into mine. I remember that I wanted to look elsewhere, but couldn't.

After a while, she began to talk, and I found myself nodding in acquiescence with all she said.

"I see you, *ja baaba*," she said. "You are walking toward where the sun rises. You look for something. You make six times ten steps, then again four. You find what you want, where three trees are in one line. It is a branch you want. You cut it with your knife . . ."

I was not hypnotized, for I clearly recollect every word the Pythoness said, but I recall that monotonous nodding of my head. I didn't want to nod; I wanted to speak instead, and say that was what I was thinking about. But I couldn't speak, and I kept on nodding.

"You sit down on a stone," Twadekili went on. "To clean the branch and make a staff of it. Then you bend, to the right and to the left. To get the food and the drinking water your men have brought to you."

Now I wanted to say that she was wrong. I was sure I had

had my lunch on a fallen trunk that day, at the foot of the hill, near the truck—not on the stone on the top of the hill. Why, that was even where my boys had found the empty sardine tin. But, again, all I could do was nod.

Finally Twadekili gave a low-pitched cry. "I see it!" she exclaimed. "I see it. It slips out. It slides down on the grass. It slips under the stone, which has the form of a huge snake's head."

The eyes of the Pythoness closed. And the moment they did, my head halted its motion.

"Exactly!" I thought. *That was the detail I had been trying to get hold of*—and couldn't. Now, for the first time, I remembered it perfectly. After having lunch at the foot of the hill, I did climb up to cut that branch. While I sat on that stone, smoking and making the staff, my boys did bring me the lunch basket and the flasks. Not because I wanted to eat and drink more, but because the boys wished me to close those gadgets which to them looked so expensive and so fragile.

It seemed perfectly plausible that there was where I had lost the cigarette case. But, if so, why had the three boys not found it? They had assured me that they had looked all over the place—and they had good eyes, those Kaffirs.

Before I could sort out this rush of thoughts and speak them aloud, Twadekili lifted her head. She opened her eyes and looked unseeingly into the distance, as was her habit during consultations.

"Nomazindo," she said with a tired voice, "he will go there. And there he will find the 'yellow box of smoke.' And of the generous present your boys have not earned, two parts you will give to Nomazindo, one part to the boys. And they will be glad. And Nomazindo will be able to marry."

She invoked the greatest of gods, and she was gone.

I remained speechless. What stunned me most was what she had said about the present for the boys. I had simply spoken to them of a "generous present," and had thought of giving them the equivalent of ten dollars if they found the cigarette case. But I had not mentioned the figure to anyone. Yet the Pythoness had known it. Had she read it in my mind? Or was it pure coincidence? At any rate, two-thirds of that sum would just buy two cows and allow the young lovers to realize their dream.

Nomazindo interrupted my thoughts. "I will go, *ja baaba*," he said with a radiant face. "I will go right now." Only then did I realize that he and his girl had been there, close by, the whole time, faithfully waiting as the Pythoness had commanded.

Of course, I couldn't let them go alone. I wanted to go too, and see for myself. I made it clear to Nomazindo that the prize would be his just the same, if we found the "yellow box of smoke," but that he didn't have to walk all the way. All he had to do was to sit near me and direct me. In a moment I was behind the wheel of the truck. Nomazindo and his girl fearfully climbed up in the back, and we were off, rolling down the hill, then charging up the next one.

Time and miles and hills and valleys fled away. Nomazindo knew perfectly where we were going. Following his directions, at the end of a few hours I brought the truck to a stop near the fallen trunk where a week before I had sat for a brief lunch and lighted my last cigarette out of that gold case.

"Toward where the sun rises," Nomazindo murmured with repressed excitement. "Six times ten steps, then again four."

I walked after him, counting our steps, the girl timidly fol-

lowing us at some distance, as if overwhelmed by her participation in a magic of the Pythoness.

"Three trees in one line."

There they were, sure enough. On the ground, shrunk and dried up, still lay the shavings I had thrown around when I had cleaned the stick. And there was the stone on which I had sat. It did have somewhat "the form of a huge snake's head."

I don't know if I was more thrilled by the expectation of finding again my treasured possession, or by seeing Twadekili's words come true. Anxiously, I began to search all around the rock. There was not a shadow of skepticism in my mind—any moment now I was going to catch a gleam of gold in the grass.

The disappointment was only more profound when, having made a complete inspection all around the rock, I returned to the point from which I had started, without having found it. I went around again, then I looked up at the waiting Nomazindo.

"Nothing," I said, without trying to hide my baffled sense of disillusionment.

Nomazindo laughed, and politely he asked me to give him a hand. The girl joined us, and all together we tried to move the stone.

"What's the use?" I said after a while. "The Pythoness was wrong for once, that's all."

Nomazindo didn't laugh, this time. He looked at me and shook his head gravely. "No, *ja baaba*," he said. "Twadekili is never wrong. Never."

While I wiped the perspiration off my forehead, he ran down the hill, came back with a pole he had seen in the truck and began to use it as a lever.

His confidence was so contagious, that, despite my disbelief, I joined him. We gave a mighty push, and the stone turned over. Beneath it was a hole, about a foot deep, excavated by some small animal. And in the bottom, my cigarette case was shining—amid a heap of crawling ants desperately trying to find some access to the tobacco which they had smelled.

Nomazindo and his girl were murmuring the usual invocation of thanks. I found myself lifting up my right forefinger, too, just as they did.

The Python and the Blind Man

ONCE, AND once only, in all the time I spent in the vicinity of Twadekili's kraal, was I allowed to watch her python operate as a somewhat active partner of hers. It was during one of her most sensational healings—one which, until well thought over and reasoned out, seemed a miracle.

One day, an elderly native arrived at the kraal. Groping his way along, tapping on the ground with a stick, his body bent and sagging, the poor fellow advanced slowly toward the place where he could hear Twadekili talking with me. Soon, I saw that his eyes were horribly infected and swollen, so much so that they aroused in me almost as much disgust as pity. When he stopped near us and saluted the Pythoness with touching humility and devotion, she answered him with her usual poise.

"The white cock is ready," she said. "It was waiting for your arrival."

What had a white cock to do with the man's blindness? I was wondering if I had misunderstood Twadekili's words, and how she had obtained advance information of the man's coming, when Ramini, her disciple, came out of her own hut. In her hands she held a white cock.

Twadekili took it and, after muttering some magic words, began to rub its head along the ground. Its beak was made to trace in the dust complicated hieroglyphics until, finally, the bird became rigid, hypnotized, I would say. So completely was the rooster under the domination of the Pythoness that when she placed it on the patient's head it stood there motionless, its legs stiff as ramrods.

Other words followed which I couldn't understand. Twadekili's hands made a few magic passes. Then a knife flashed—and the head of the bird fell on the ground, while a spurt of blood anointed the face of the motionless patient.

In the silence which weighed over the whole kraal, I heard the soft steps of the returning Ramini. She handed a wooden plate to Twadekili, who pulled from it a handful of what appeared to be a thick, almost solid poultice of boiled herbs. This mixture she spread abundantly over the blood-covered eyes of the patient. Then she guided him toward her hut, helped him through the low door and nodded to me to follow.

The invitation surprised me, so much so that I went in before even thinking of the python. The moment I was in, however, I saw it. And for a few seconds I regretted my hastiness. But it was too late to retreat.

"Don't be an ass," I said to myself, as my eyes got adjusted to the dimness and became fixed on the immense form rising from its round nest. "And keep quiet!"

Of course, by then I should have known better than to be afraid of Twadekili's python. I should have known better than to fear that she would allow anything unpleasant to happen. Moreover, she and her patient were between me and the python; yet I could not control the sickening feeling that a snake always arouses in me.

Up and up the gigantic serpent reared itself, until its head was on a level with that of the blind man. At that point, some kind of silent command from the Pythoness halted it. And there it remained, as motionless as a stuffed specimen, but for the continuous flickering of its tongue.

Twadekili must have been well sure of her control over the monster, because, for the first time since we had entered, she unlocked her gaze from that of the snake. She turned around, and closed her eyes a moment, as if exhausted by the effort of concentration she had undergone. Then she bent and picked up a calabash which, as far as I could judge, was filled with nothing but pure water.

With the calabash in her hands, and without paying any further attention to the python, she turned toward the man, and began to talk to him. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, in more and more excited tones, until her voice reached a high pitch of hysteria of which I would not have believed her capable.

Then, abruptly, she stopped.

The shrillest cry I have ever heard followed. "The python!" she shrieked. And, at the same time, she flung the cool contents of the calabash smack into the man's face.

"The python!" she cried again. "It's there—before your own face! Look at it! Look at it—it is going to get you!"

The man gasped. He shook his head. Swiftly he passed his hand over his eyes, and opened them. A shout of anguish—and he slid to the floor, unconscious.

The Pythoness sighed deeply. She looked at me with an infinitely tired smile. She turned toward the python, which had never moved, and again its diabolical eyes met hers. The snake began to shrink, backward, downward, slowly, almost

unnoticeably. I couldn't say how long it took. But at last it was all coiled up, back in its nest, practically invisible in the darkness of its corner, except for those diabolical eyes, shining with a malignant glitter.

We went outside. And, I must confess, seldom had the light and warmth of the sun felt so pleasant to me. We sat down without a word, one on each side of the doorway.

Immediately Ramini came toward us, a baa-ing white kid under her left arm, a wooden vase in her right hand. She entered the hut of the Pythoness, and closed the door behind her. But I soon heard a final, strangled "baa" and an unmistakable gulping sound.

I tried to distract my mind by thinking over what I had just seen. The act of the rooster—was it simply the *mise en scène* I've mentioned? Or was it that the warm blood of the cock was supposed to act as the necessary complement to the healing properties of that poultice of herbs?

And the python? Wild creatures of every kind, snakes included, have been trained for ages, all over the world—there wasn't anything extraordinary in that. But the whole dramatic build-up for psychological effect upon the patient—primitive and crude as it had been, didn't it indicate the value attributed by that Xosa medicine woman to the supremacy of the mind over the body?

After the actual treatment had been administered, the man's subconscious belief in his sickness might still have kept him from being healed—or might have delayed the cure indefinitely. Instead, there had come that barrage of words, the unexpected shock of the cold shower, the frantic cries . . . The man had tried, desperately, to see. He *had* to see, instantly. Still dim and confused, his eyes had discerned the

monstrous contours of the python's head so near to his; perhaps the flickering of that forked tongue. All his reflexes, his instinct of self-preservation had rushed to his assistance, wiped out every subconscious opposition. The man had fainted, yes. But didn't that mean that he had seen, that he was at least partially healed?

Behind us the door opened.

The man came out. Alone, straight. His eyes almost normal, bright, filled with tears of happiness inexpressible. Ramini had washed him clean, I noticed.

The Pythoness looked far away, into that world of hers which was invisible to us. The man did not thank her. He just crouched on the ground near her.

"Umkulu-Mkulu be praised," she said, still looking away.

"Umkulu-Mkulu be praised," he said. And his glittering brown eyes looked up toward the once more discovered blue sky.

A New Pythoness Is Born

AMONG ALL the virgins in Twadekili's kraal, Ramini was the only one who had her hair arranged in many little braids, like the Pythoness herself. I knew, of course, that she was Twadekili's only disciple and that for years she had been her closest assistant. But when would she, too, become a Pythoness? How? What means would she use to get herself the python without which a Pythoness could not very well be a Pythoness?

These often-repeated questions Twadekili evaded every time, in one way or another. All she consented to tell me was a bit, now and then, about Ramini's youth. But I would never have obtained a full picture of the girl's life—and even less gained the unique privilege of witnessing her strange initiation—had it not been for a lucky chance.

One day I was at the kraal of Nguo, an old friend of mine, to watch and photograph the magic dance of a witchdoctor of cattle who had been called in from a far district to chase from Nguo's cows a severe disease.

In spite of his advanced age, this sorcerer was a superb specimen of Xosa Kaffir, straight and statuesque, and with a grand air about him. I liked him at first sight, and I became absolutely devoted to him as soon as I learned that he was the father of Ramini. From then on, I stuck to him all the

time he remained at Nguo's, and by tickling his paternal pride and listening attentively to his long talks, I gathered enough facts to complete the sketchy information I had obtained from the Pythoness, and to be able to reconstruct with some preciseness Ramini's life.

Some twenty-three years before, on the day the girl was to be born, Twadekili unexpectedly appeared at the distant kraal of the sorcerer and walked directly toward the hut of the expectant mother, his youngest, healthiest, prettiest wife.

The arrival of the Pythoness put an abrupt stop to the cries of the women who continually shout before the hut of a woman in labor, so that the spirits may not hear the lamentations. The sorceress of births at once went away, as if bowing before the intervention of a superior. Everybody else in the kraal retreated, gathered around the head of the family, waiting in anxious silence for Twadekili to reappear. From her intervention, everyone deduced that the child soon to be born would be a girl, and that the mother would experience no pain. And, in fact, not a single cry issued from the hut.

Presently the Pythoness came out, carrying in her outstretched arms a tiny brown scrap of humanity, which she handed to the father.

"This daughter of yours," she said, "Umkulu-Mkulu christens Ramini. Bring her up with care, for she will be a great Pythoness. At the appointed time, I will come for her."

And she went away amid a chorus of thanks and humble salutations from all the family and friends, while Ramini, still in the arms of her awed father, instead of crying, smiled—a thing extraordinary for a new-born baby.

From that day, Ramini grew strong, healthy, intelligent and sweet. None of the many sicknesses that the evil spirits

blow into the bodies of other children touched her, because, everybody believed, she was protected by the enchanted necklace of red and black beads which Twadekili had put around her neck. Everyone in the kraal treated her as if she were a little princess. For her were the best morsels of food, the most desirable pieces of cloth, the softest mats on which to sleep.

When she was still only eight or nine years old, her father began to take her into his hut and make long speeches to her, a thing he would not do to honor even a grown woman. From that time, never did an *induna* or another witchdoctor come to visit him but that before he left he imparted to the child some new knowledge, told her some ancient secret of deep wisdom. And Ramini listened, understood, absorbed, with a seriousness and maturity of intelligence far beyond her years.

When twelve years had passed since Ramini's birth, Twadekili came to fetch the child. Naturally, no Xosa Kaffir doubted that this, as well as every previous and following move, had been specifically ordered by the spirit of the long-dead Pythoness over whose grave Twadekili slept.

This time an elaborate ceremony took place, during which Twadekili assured herself of the virginity of her new disciple. And, at the end of the festivities, each inhabitant of the kraal bade farewell to the child who from now on would no longer be their relative, but "the daughter of the Pythoness."

Years passed, solitary ones for Ramini as far as the outside world was concerned, but ones filled with interest because of the secret instructions of the Pythoness which she was absorbing all the while. For several hours each day, the two would close themselves in the hut of the python, carry out together strange ceremonies, prepare mysterious concoctions,

chant magic formulas. Everyone thought that the day was approaching when Ramini, reaching the maturity of her art, would receive from Umkulu-Mkulu the counselor who would be her companion for life—the python.

Once consecrated as a Pythoness, she would start the practice of her powers. And in a hut of her own she would begin to give consultations and treatments, under the spiritual protection of Twadekili, who would pass to her the simplest cases. Half of the compensation she would receive from patients would be her own, the other half would go to her teacher. This would continue until the day when Twadekili and her python would die together, and together be buried under the floor of the hut of Ramini, who would then become a full-fledged Pythoness. Only then would she be a complete master of her profession. For to her would pass the supreme knowledge of her dead teacher, whose spirit, as well as that of the dead python, would always be near her and her own python, to encourage, inspire and enlighten them.

This laboriously acquired information, which I have briefly summarized, was intensely interesting to me. Especially in view of the fact that a fine new hut was being built with unusual care at the other extremity of Twadekili's kraal, and no one seemed willing to tell me for what use such a large hut was destined.

One afternoon, as I watched all the inhabitants of the kraal hurriedly putting the last touches to the construction, I felt strongly that the consecration of the novitiate was near at hand, and was connected with the completion of that hut.

To my questions, more insistent than ever, Twadekili at first answered vaguely. After a few moments of deep thinking, however, a twinkle sparkled in her mongoloid eyes and

she smiled. "When the moon is full," she said, "her eyes see many things which happen in the land of the Xosas. Other eyes also can see those same things. If they belong to one who is as alert and patient and silent as the moon is." And she quickly retreated to the privacy of her hut.

Six days had passed since the first quarter, so that the moon would not be full until the following night. But, not daring to take any chance, that night I posted myself on the veranda of my little tent. It was pitched about a hundred feet from Twadekili's kraal, in a position from which I could barely see the "Lair of Serpents" far off to the left, comfortably watch Twadekili's hut directly before me and still keep an eye on the brand-new hut to my right. Patiently I sat there until the first light of dawn; but nothing happened.

The following day I slept till lunchtime. Then I spent the afternoon and early evening waiting for Twadekili or Ramini to emerge, as I wished very much to ask either one of them for some further explanation. However, when nine o'clock came and both of them still remained invisible, I gave up all hope of talking to them. And once more I took up my post of observation.

In spite of all my desire to keep awake, sleep weighed heavy upon my eyelids. At last, a little past midnight, I had to get up; and to drive away the somnolence, I began pacing slowly around my tent, while smoking one cigarette after another.

My calendar-diary gave the time of the full moon as 12:51. I kept looking at the dial of my watch, clearly visible in the bright moonlight. And, as the long hand reached 53 minutes past midnight, I screwed up my eyes to inspect again the pat-

tern of silvery-lit huts and dark, shadowy patches of the still kraal.

In the pool of blackness behind a hut, something was stirring.

Straining my eyes, I moved a few paces nearer. A moment later, the figure of a woman appeared, stiff and straight, gliding over the ground, arms stretched rigidly before her.

She slid between two huts. She entered a space clearly lighted by the moon and I saw her distinctly. Her hair fell in many little braids—it was Ramini. What was she doing at that hour? Completely naked, her plump body smeared by some oily substance which brought a glistening to her solid curves, she was moving with the unearthly motion of a somnambulist. In a moment she disappeared into another shadow, then once more she emerged into the light. Again she vanished in the darkness at the edge of the kraal, and when I again saw her clearly, it seemed to me that she was advancing straight toward me.

I waited where I was standing, repeating to myself Twadekili's words and keeping perfectly quiet.

Ramini passed within a few yards of me. Her eyes were open, I saw, but fixed in a staring gaze ahead of her, and she took not the slightest notice of me. On she walked, steadily, silent as a shadow, with the strange effect of a statue gliding over the ground.

I waited a few seconds. Then I began to realize that, consciously or not, she was proceeding toward the "Lair of Serpents"—and the temptation to follow her was too much for me.

Careful to avoid making any noise, I went after her, my

mind struggling between overpowering curiosity to see what was going to happen and the fear of seeing the girl approach, so defenselessly, that horrible place which I would not have cared to enter at night, even armed with a strong torch and a loaded gun.

Ramini seemed to hesitate only a moment when she reached the deepest shadows behind the outcrop of rocks. Stronger than herself, however, some secret will pushed her ahead—to the edge of that dreadful spot, and some steps into it. Then she stopped and stood motionless, her arms still outstretched before her, her dim silhouette framed by the arches of branches interlaced over her head.

Having approached as near as the first rocks, I debated if I should call out her name, even though my warning might awake her abruptly from the state of somnambulism in which I believed her to be. But I waited because of the pungent odor which was reaching my nostrils. I had just decided that the strange smell came from the oily substance spread on Ramini's body, and was about to open my mouth when in my ears Twadekili's voice seemed to sound again.

"... as alert and patient and silent as the moon is," the Pythoness had said.

Then there was a rustling sound, just in front of the still motionless Ramini. And now I could not have spoken if I had wanted to. An enormous python was rearing itself up, face to face with the girl. Its head was barely visible, but its malignant eyes shone like two precious stones, the flickering of its forked tongue caught pale gleams of light.

Then Ramini gave a convulsive sigh, and I felt a cold chill crawl down my back. Had the spell been broken? Was she to fall victim to that serpent, before my eyes? What could I do?

But Ramini silently turned around like an automaton. Her arms still rigidly outstretched, she walked back toward the kraal—and toward me.

Quickly, I moved several paces to one side, so as not to be in her way. And there I stood, rooted to the ground.

At Ramini's heels the python—a creature certainly seventeen or eighteen feet long—was following. Quietly, harmlessly, measuring its speed to that of the virgin.

The scene was fantastic. Under the brilliant light of the moon, in the utter stillness of the African night, that naked, shining girl advanced slowly, mechanically, followed by that creeping, sinuous body from which metallic reflections vibrated and sparkled.

I myself was as if under some kind of spell, my whole mind so dazzled that it could not even attempt to understand what my eyes were seeing. Not until Ramini reached the kraal, and unerringly walked to the new hut and disappeared into its blackness with the python, did I even think of looking at the ground.

Then I bent down, and there, in the dust, I saw something tangible, sane, understandable—the marks left by the passage of the heavy body of the snake. Those imprints seemed to carry some assurance of reality to my brain; and when I went back to my tent and stretched on my camp bed, I fell into a deep sleep.

Late the next morning, a great clamor awakened me. I looked out of the little window and saw in the kraal an immense throng of men and women. More were coming from every direction, singing loudly.

Ramini was nowhere in sight. But before her hut, Pythoness Twadekili was dancing a dance of rejoicing.

"A new Pythoness is born," she cried.

And the whole crowd lustily joined her in singing the praise of the supreme god. "Umkulu-Mkulu be thanked! Umkulu-Mkulu be thanked!"

While I dressed in a hurry, I, too, thanked Umkulu-Mkulu. But for a different reason—it was that my role had been limited to that of a passive witness during that last adventure of mine with African snakes.

Now, I reiterate my thanks. And passing abruptly from the past to the present, from Africa's most hateful creatures back to one of her most lovable inhabitants, I shall end this volume by sharing with the reader a deeply stirring letter that I recently received from the Congo.

Letter from the Congo

THE SECOND World War caught my last expedition while we were still in Rwanda. At once I sent Charlie, the two cameramen and the mechanic back to America. A few months later I had to leave, too, in order to take advantage of the last regular sailing of the Belgian Line.

In Stanleyville, I paid off my native boys, arranged for their transportation back to their respective villages and gave each of them an envelope with my New York address typed on it. I even pasted a Belgian Congo stamp on each envelope. "If you ever need anything," I told the boys, "write me. Even from America I will do what I can."

Back in America, I sometimes read in the paper brief notes about Belgian Congo native troops fighting valiantly with the Allies—in Somaliland, in Eritrea, in Abyssinia. With my wife, I often wondered if any of our ex-boys had joined the *Force Publique*, as the Belgian Congo's native army is called, and seen action. They were good boys, but we couldn't see one of them cutting a hero's figure in modern war. And we never heard from any of them.

"They've forgotten us," we said. Or, "Writing a letter is too much for them."

Then, a few weeks before writing these last pages, a letter

came. It was painstakingly penciled in the Kingwana language on two dirty pages. Translated, it said:

"To the good master of old, from his boy whose name is Bombo and whom he often called the Ever-Scared One—health, peace and prosperity.

"This writing is not for help, but for glad news. The peanut crop is good. The game is plentiful. The children are growing. The wives are faring well—though one was sick when the drums first spoke in the night and said that the evil white men and the evil yellow men of far far away had gone to war against the Belgians, the Frenchmen, the Americans and others who are their friends.

"One of the wives, the eldest, was sick. But the drums spoke again. They said that the enemies were killing and torturing even the men and women of mercy who heal the wounded and bury the dead, even the men and women of God such as those who taught me to worship the True Lord, to read the written word and to write it with my own hand.

"One of the wives was sick with much pain. The others did much groaning and crying. But my feet took me away from the village, my heart took me where the soldiers have their camp.

"There the white man doctor did his magic. He looked at my tongue. He peered into my eyes and ears. He knocked at my chest. He pierced my arms with needles loaded with white man's medicine. And—lo—I was a soldier.

"I was a soldier and was made to march and turn and stop. Until the white man lieutenant gave me a rifle which was the property of the white men of government, but my own to polish, to furbish and carry on my shoulder for many a long hour.

"Then I learned to lay my cheek on it, to close one eye and peep with the other in a little hole, and to pull with my forefinger. And—lo—the rifle gave out a thunder and my heart quivered with fear and my shoulder was numb with pain. But the bullet had gone in the middle of a round piece of paper.

"So, the white man lieutenant said: And now we go far to the north and put bullets not in round pieces of paper, but in the heart of the bad enemies of the good men. And I was filled with fear, because my mother did not make me either bold or brave.

"After many moons of travel, the white man lieutenant said: Soldiers, the enemies are there. And one of them, who was not to be seen, lifted his gun toward the white man lieutenant. But I heard the movement and knew where he was in ambush and put a bullet in his heart first. And, though I still was trembling with fright, I was made a corporal. Because my ears had proved good.

"Then, another day, I saw that the white man lieutenant was about to walk over a strange trap. So my feet ran ahead of him and my hands uncovered the trap and pulled it out. And the trap made a great thunder with a lightning in it and I was much scared. But all was well. For I was the only wounded. And the white lieutenant is not dead, but can fight more evil enemies.

"Then the white man colonel, he himself, came to the hospital. And everyone was silent at attention. And I was weak with loss of blood, and with sleeping in a bed, and with much fright. But he had only come to pin a medal on my chest. Because my eyes had proved good. And as he pinned the medal he said: Now you are healed, go back to your village

and be the chief. Which is a great honor and good. But I was unable to speak. Instead I laughed and laughed. And the white man colonel said: Why do you laugh like a big chimpanzee? And I said: Because the pin is gone through the coat and is tickling my chest. So, the white man colonel laughed. All the others laughed. Everyone laughed like a big chimpanzee. Though I was not tickling their chests with any medal's pin.

"Ha. It was a great joke.

"And now I am back. And my eldest wife is well. And so is the peanut crop. And so I wish to you.

"Your faithful boy,

"Bombo."

On the back of the second page there were some more lines, in the same carefully penciled handwriting. By now I had some difficulty in reading. My eyes grew even more blurred before I finished reading the following lines:

"The words are my own. But not the writing. Because my two hands are no longer with me. The trap took them away in its thunder. But it matters not. Because other men now write and work and hunt for me. And all is well. Because the trap took away my eyes, too. But my ears still are good."

